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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help those involved with the United Kingdom's Workers' Educational Association (WEA) to recognize the learning needs of and to develop teaching methods for students with visual impairments (VIs). Introductory materials cover objectives and how to use the guide. Section 1, "What Do We Mean by VI?" compares preconceptions about VI with reality, describing different degrees of VI and introducing common eye conditions and their effect on the student's learning needs. Section 2, "What Are the Implications for WES Field Staff/Branches?" uses a case study approach that is based on a survey of WEA provision for visually impaired adult students. It follows a new student through the key stages involved in arriving at a WEA class and looks at ways in which the WEA could have facilitated the journey. Section 3, "What Does It Mean for the WEA Tutor?" collects good practice suggestions from the survey, together with advice from experienced tutors and texts. Section 4, "A Trainer's Perspective," outlines the structure and content of a successful course and provides tips on organizing a course. Each section concludes with suggestions for practical tasks to improve the user's knowledge of VI and to assess the quality of policy and practice in provision for visually impaired students. Section 5 contains resources referred to in the main text that are also suitable for use by field staff/branches for tutor training courses or by tutors as performance aids as they apply their learning on the job. (YLB)

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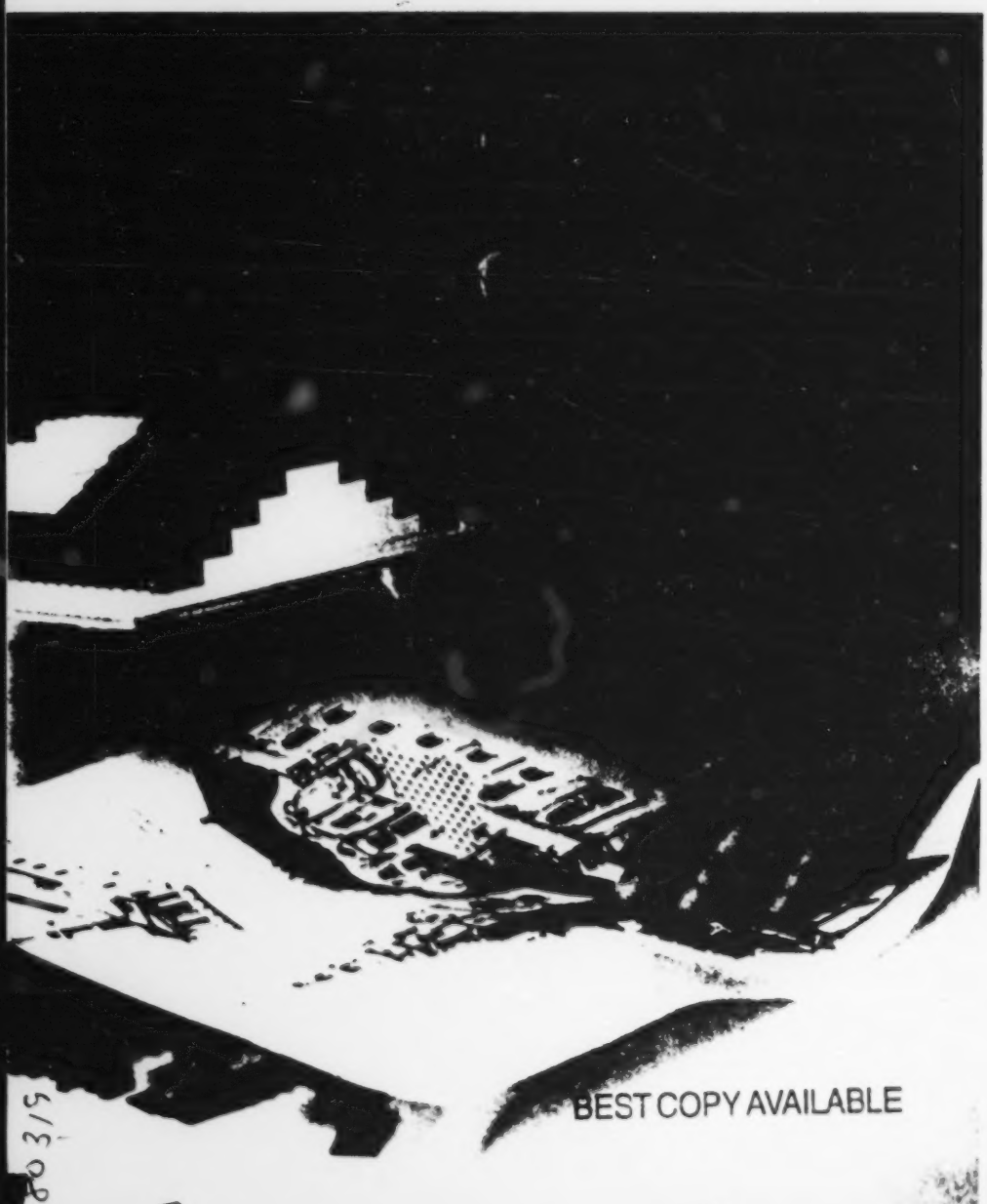

A Guide for Tutors and Trainers

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Working with Visually Impaired Adults

A Guide for Tutors and Trainers

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Bob Payne

Acknowledgements

This guide initially arose out of our survey of WEA provision for visually impaired adults. We learned much from our students, tutors, field staff and partner organisations that we wished to disseminate throughout the WEA. Our heartfelt thanks go to all those who contributed their time, advice, materials and ideas to us. Acknowledgement for permission to print specific materials is made in situ. We particularly wish to thank WEA tutors Susie Bevin, June Bretherton, Erica Brook, John Duckworth, Terry Pearce and Derek Seaton; Derek Tatton, WEA Tutor Organiser and Warden, Wedgewood Memorial College; David Mumford, Deputy Director, Royal Leicestershire, Rutland and Wycliffe Society for the Blind; Shirley Garner, RNIB Education Research Officer, Cheryll McCandlish, RNIB Project Development Officer, Lifelong Learning for Older Visually Impaired People, and Gordon Dryden, Assistant Director, Post-16 Policy, RNIB.

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Cover photo:
An archaeology class taught in Leicester by Terry Pearce, reproduced with thanks.

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Preface

I am blind, have always been blind and always will be. I don't mind people knowing that: in fact I want them to know it. What I do not want is their pity or condescension. And what I do want is to be able to learn the same kinds of things as sighted people learn.

(A blind person quoted in *Inclusive Learning*, HMSO, 1996)

To say our first venture left a lot to be desired would be an understatement. My lack of knowledge and pre-conceived ideas of 'the blind' revealed itself at our first meeting. I had expected to find myself facing a group of totally blind students complete with white sticks and dogs. (In fact there were only two dogs, and that number has never risen since our first meeting in 1982.)

There were, in fact, very few totally blind members of the group; most of the class suffered from eye conditions which I had never heard of, and had certainly given no thought to any special needs that might be required. For example, special seating arrangements were needed so that some members could avoid direct light; others, suffering from the painful eye condition, glaucoma, had to avoid bending which puts pressure on the eye, so objects had to be displayed above chest height.

These problems were quickly rectified and I moved on to the next major difficulty - myself. I was conscious of avoiding the verbs 'look' and 'see'. This began to develop into a crippling embarrassment which I personally had to overcome if the venture was to succeed. Finally I plucked up courage and blurted out, 'let us look at this group of finds and see what we can make of them.' The group leaned forward expectantly - they were, as Michael Aston says, 'simply ordinary people who cannot see.'

(Terry Pearce, WEA tutor)

There is clear evidence that visually impaired students are under-represented in further and adult education. In addition, for many of those taking part, the quality of what is on offer is of inferior quality.[1]

[1] *Inclusive Learning*. HMSO, 1996.

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Our starting point in compiling this guide was our wish see **all** adults, including those with disabilities, claiming their entitlement to lifelong learning. If this is to be achieved, then - taking account of what Terry has described so clearly - we need to dispel misconceptions about visual impairment and identify ways in which we can adapt the learning environment to suit the learning needs of the visually impaired student more effectively.

The first section of the guide, **What do we mean by visual impairment?**, begins with some of those preconceptions - and compares them with reality. You'll then learn about the different degrees of visual impairment, before being introduced to some of the more common eye conditions and their effect on the student's learning needs.

The next section, **What are the implications for WEA field staff/Branches?**, uses a case study approach (based on a survey of WEA provision for visually impaired adult students[2]). It follows a new student, Alex, through the key stages involved in arriving at a WEA class - from first hearing about the class, to arriving at the building, navigating his way through it and joining the group in the classroom - and looks at ways in which the WEA could have facilitated this journey.

By better understanding the concerns of the visually impaired students, we will be in a better position to adapt our teaching environment to their needs. Section 3, **What does it mean for the WEA tutor?**, gathers together good practice suggestions from the same survey as that mentioned in the previous paragraph, together with advice from experienced tutors and a number of texts. You'll learn some of the key points to bear in mind as you plan, deliver and assess your course.

Finally, Section 4, **A trainer's perspective** outlines the structure and content of a successful course which ran for part-time tutors in Leicester and provides tips on organising a course of your own.

The WEA survey[2], which we refer to constantly throughout this pack, is available from: Cherry Heinrich, Tutor Organiser for Leicester

WEA, Vaughan College, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 4LB
Tel: 0116 251 9740
Fax: 0116 251 8731
email: cheinrich@emwea.org.uk

[2] Payne R, Heinrich C P and Munby Z. *Visually Impaired Students and the Workers' Educational Association*. RNIB, 1997.

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Objectives for this guide

This guide aims to help all those involved with the WEA to recognise the learning needs of students with visual impairments and to develop their own work accordingly. We would like to encourage:

1 **WEA field staff/Branches** to develop equal opportunity policy guidelines for working with visually impaired learners and to work towards:

- using publicity methods and materials which will increase accessibility for those with a visual impairment
- adapting administrative systems and procedures to ease the student's admission to courses
- improving the students' access to facilities, where appropriate, whether through lobbying the building management or through the use of volunteer support staff
- developing training for tutors to enable them to recognise and meet the needs of visually impaired students.

2 **WEA tutors** to ask appropriate questions of students (to identify the extent and type of visual impairment and its implications for their learning needs) and to adapt their teaching methods accordingly, taking into account students':

- ***physical*** needs by, for example, adapting the layout of the classroom and developing/loaning learning materials which are tailored to the needs of the student
- ***social*** needs - doing all you can, for example to ensure they become full members of their group.

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How to use this guide

Field staff/Branches may find that Sections 1, 2 and 4 are most appropriate to their objectives, while tutors may want to concentrate their attention on Sections 1, 2 and 3. However, there are important learning points for everyone in all sections.

As you can see from the Contents listing, the guide is arranged in two main blocks. The main text will refer you into the **Resources** section at appropriate points, and these references are indicated in the following way:

Resource 1

The resources are provided in a block so that:

- Field staff/Branches can use them as the basis for training courses for tutors and/or volunteer support staff
- Tutors can use them as a set of 'performance aids' or 'aides-mémoire' as they begin to apply their new learning on-the-job.

At the end of each section of the guide, there are suggestions for practical tasks, which you might undertake to improve your knowledge of visual impairment and to assess the quality of policy and practice in provision for visually impaired students in your Branch. You might want to undertake these as you read along, or complete them all together when you have finished your study of the guide. These sections are indicated as follows:

Project work
Why don't you . . .

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1 What do we mean by visual impairment?

When you first hear that a prospective student has a visual impairment, what image does this conjure up for you?

Would you, like Terry (in the Preface), expect a white stick and/or a guide dog? Would you feel the need to go out and get Braille materials or talking books?

> *A study undertaken by the RNIB in 1986/7[3] indicated that only a very small percentage of visually impaired people have no vision at all and that over a quarter of blind and partially sighted people can read newspaper print. Print of some kind is still the main medium for more than 60% of visually impaired people.*

Would you expect the student to have been blind from birth and to have developed other senses to compensate for the blindness?

> *The same RNIB study found that only a small percentage of visually impaired adults are blind from birth (8%) or through accident (5%). The majority lose vision as a result of illness or through the effects of ageing.*
>
> *'We're all individuals . . . I know that everybody thinks that because I can't see I ought to be able to play at least three musical instruments and love to listen to bird song . . . and most of these things I can't do at all'[4].*
>
> *The ABAPSTAS Conference[4] also found that tutors were inclined to steer students towards subjects they didn't want to do (music for example) - based on such stereotypes.*

In this section, you'll learn about some:

- **definitions of visual impairment**
- **common eye conditions and their effect on vision**
- **differences between students who were born with a visual impairment and those who have developed one later in life.**

3 Bruce I W, McKennell A C and Walker E C. *Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain: the RNIB survey Volume 1*. HMSO, 1991.

4 A student quoted in the *FEFC Committee Workshop - Evidence from students with disabilities*. ABAPSTAS (The Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Teachers and Students) Conference, 11 March, 1995. Loughborough University of Technology.

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Definitions of visual impairment

The term *visually impaired* is now generally regarded as an acceptable descriptor of all forms of visual disability which cannot be corrected with the use of spectacles. There are two main sub-categories:

Blind

The official definition[5] states that registration as blind is appropriate if a person is

> *'so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which sight is essential'.*

Another definition (which you may want to know in case it's quoted to you) is:

> *'vision worse than 3/60'*

This means that the person would only be able to see the top letter on an optician's chart at three metres or less. (In other words that s/he can see an object at three metres that a fully sighted person would see at 60 metres.)

However, different eye conditions cause different types of loss of vision. For example, some people have no central vision but can see things 'out of the corner of the eye'. Others have clear central vision but a vague blur outside this central area. (More about these conditions in **Resource 1**.) So, a person can also be registered blind if, for example, they can see the top letter at a distance greater than three metres, but have no side vision.

People who are registered blind will have to adopt non-sighted ways of doing some things.

Partial sight

Partial sight (which may be caused by congenital defect, illness or injury) is defined as:

> *'substantial and permanent visual impairment'.*

The optician's chart definition would be:

> *'vision worse than 6/60'*

How would you translate '6/60 vision'?

Try to answer that before reading on.

[5] National Assistance Act, 1948

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Answer to question on previous page

6/60 vision means the person could read the top letter of the optician's chart at six metres or less (or, to see at six metres what a fully sighted person could see at sixty metres). Again, there would be an adjustment for a restricted field of vision.

Partially sighted people can function using sighted methods but they'll need good lighting and effective colour contrast to do so effectively. Usually, they'll also require a larger print size.

Before we move on to look at the different types of eye condition and their effect on vision, let's take a brief look at two other important groups of visually impaired students.

Students with failing sight

Failing sight is used to define people whose sight is starting to deteriorate, usually due to ageing processes. Spectacles may help some with reading and others may benefit from a range of aids such as magnifiers and task lighting. (More about aids in **Resource 8**.)

Although no national survey has been undertaken, results from a small local study undertaken during the preparation of the WEA survey report indicate that many students in WEA liberal adult education classes belong to this group. (The percentages were clearly connected to the age profile of the classes surveyed.)

This evidence suggests that tutors in mainstream provision need to be more aware of deteriorating eyesight amongst older adults and the steps they can take to improve the quality of the learning environment for these students.

For these people, as with those who are more severely visually impaired, the size, colour and typeface of the print used will be crucial for ease of reading.

Students with dual and multiple impairment

A number of people who are already registered as blind or partially sighted also have a hearing loss. There are an estimated 20,000 deafblind people in the United Kingdom, with varying degrees of both visual and hearing impairment. Dual impairment or deafblindness may occur at birth or can arise where a person who is already visually impaired or blind suffers sudden or gradual loss of hearing, whether through accident, injury or old age.

[1] Payne R, Heinrich C P and Munby Z *Visually Impaired Students and the Workers' Educational Association*. RNIB, 1997

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In our provision for visually impaired students it is likely that one or more members of the group will have a hearing disability as well as a visual disability. Where a student group is older, aged sixty or over, a third of the group may be hard of hearing[7].

Generally, deafblind adults will require specialist provision, beyond the remit of this guide. However, references will be made, at various points, to potential sources of such specialist provision.

WEA tutors who work with people with multiple disabilities can expect that some students will have a visual disability. Again, this is a specialist area of work but some of the ideas in this guide may apply to these groups.

Common eye conditions and their effect on vision

Visual impairment has many causes, ranging from conditions present at birth, damage caused by accidents, common diseases of the eye and impairment as a result of an inherited condition.

Some conditions are correctable with spectacles and some are not. In this publication we are concerned, primarily, with those which are not (since they are the ones for which you will need to adapt your teaching methods).

Do you know how the eye works? If not, you'll need to read the following page first. If you do, you should read **Resource 1** now, then turn to page 13.

Resource 1 describes, in alphabetical order, the most common non-correctable eye conditions. You'll find that the table charts the usual causes, treatment and, perhaps most usefully for your own purposes, the effect on vision (which will affect, in turn, the student's learning needs).

Resource 1

[7] Bruce I W, McKennell A C and Walker E C. *Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain: the RNIB survey. Volume 1.* HMSO, 1991.

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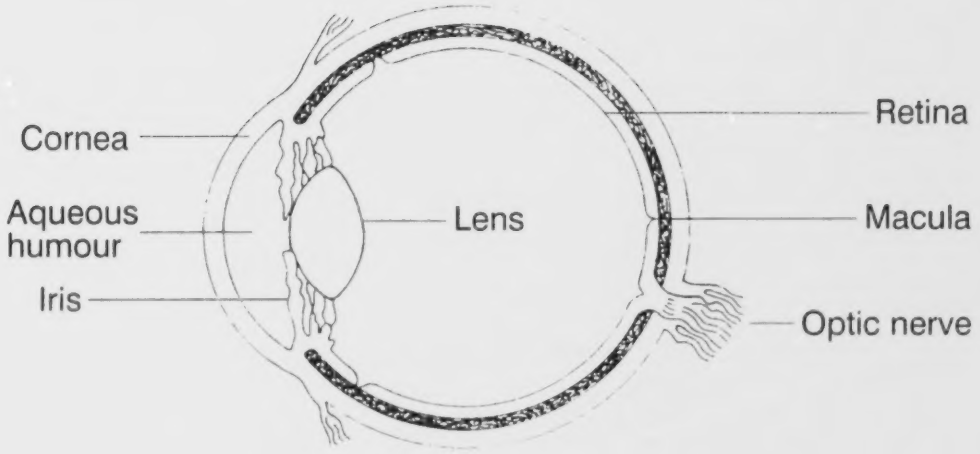
How we see



The eye is rather like a camera:

A **lens** and an aperture, or opening, (controlled by the **iris**) adjust, together, to bring objects into focus on the retina at the back of the eye. Lens problems, which are correctable with spectacles, include:

- Short sight or *myopia*: caused by the eyeball being too long for the lens to be able to focus on objects in the distance. A concave lens can be used to correct this focus.
- Long sight or *hypermetropia*: caused by the eyeball being too short for the lens to focus on close objects. This is correctable with a convex lens.

Astigmatism, another correctable problem, is caused by distortions in the curve of the **cornea**. This makes the rays focus in different positions, making it impossible, for example, to focus on horizontal and vertical lines at the same time. This is correctable with cylindrical lenses.

- Anything which might obscure the **lens** will affect sight and this might include:
  - a clouding of the lens (See *Cataracts* in the *Eye Conditions* chart)
  - a drooping **eyelid**, which may be caused by a nerve or muscle defect (see *Ptosis* in the *Eye Conditions* chart).

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- The **aqueous humour** is a clear, watery substance between the cornea and the lens. Normally, this is produced and cleared away on a regular basis. However, if there is a build up of fluid (caused when it is produced more quickly than it drains away) there will be a build up of pressure in the eye, causing *glaucoma*.
- The **retina** is equivalent, in this analogy, to the photographic film. It is made up of a delicate, light sensitive tissue. Just as you can't take good pictures with a faulty film, you can't see clearly with a defective retina (See *Retinal Problems* in the *Eye Conditions* chart.)
- The **macula**, at the centre of the retina, is responsible for central vision and for seeing fine details and colour (See *Macular Disease* in the *Eye Conditions* chart.)

Seeing is not just a function of the eye itself - it also requires the **optic nerve** and the **brain**. Continuing the photography analogy, if the eye is the camera, the brain is equivalent to the processing company and the optic nerve corresponds to the person who took the film to the shop:

- If the **brain** is faulty, then it cannot interpret the images received by the eye and, even if the eye is in perfect working order, the person will not be able to see. (See *Hemianopia* in the *Eye Conditions* chart.)
- The **optic nerve** sends messages about the images to the brain. Again, if the optic nerve is damaged then the images will not get to the brain and the person will not be able to see. (See *Optic Atrophy* in the *Eye Conditions* chart.)

Resource 1

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So, why is it important for tutors to know about all these eye conditions? Well, at a very basic level, it helps you to get a feel for what the student is experiencing. (But words are not enough - do try to borrow the slides or a training video, or the simulation spectacles mentioned in **Resource 1**.)

In addition, by distinguishing between the symptoms displayed in each condition - rather than lumping *'The visually impaired'* together under one heading in your mind - you will begin to identify how you can adapt your teaching materials and methods in ways which are appropriate for particular conditions. For example:

- large print handouts may be useful for many people with a visual impairment. But for the student with glaucoma they would make the situation worse, as there would be only a few words clear in the centre of vision. These students need aids (minifiers) to help widen the angle of sight available to them.
- the colour red may be most useful for students with a cataract, but for those with retinitis, blue and yellow are the most easily identified colours.

Thirdly, when you take the trouble to find out about a student's condition, and to chat about it, you help to demonstrate your interest in them and their learning needs.

As you prepare to teach you will need to find out as much as you can about each student's eye condition and its effect on their vision so that you can adapt your teaching materials and methods accordingly. (More on this in Section 3.)

You should also know that each student will be affected by the level of light available at any given time, by his or her own physical and psychological health, by tiredness and by other factors. (Don't be tempted to dismiss problems with *'Oh he can see when he wants to.'*)

Differences between students who were born with a visual impairment and those who have developed one later in life.

There are two main differences between these two groups:

- their **educational background**
- the nature and extent of their **visual imagery**.

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Educational background

People who have lost their sight during their lifetime will have the usual range of educational experience found in any adult class - although they will have had to develop, or still be finding out, new ways of learning.[8]

For children with special needs, though, there has been a chequered history of educational provision - which means students in different age groups may have been:

- excluded altogether from education
- educated separately in special schools
- integrated into mainstream provision (mainly since the Education Act 1981).

Sometimes you may find that students have been over-protected, not encouraged to take risks and not expected to achieve very much. It will be important to work with the student to build up skills and confidence and to reinforce them with frequent positive feedback.

Visual imagery

People who have lost their sight during their lifetime possess a series of visual mental images that help them to make sense of their current experience, although these may become inaccurate over time.

People who have been blind from birth, on the other hand, have had to build up their 'view' of the world with little or no visual experience. They may have difficulty in understanding things that sighted people take for granted. Imagine, for example:

- trying to describe a camel, a skyscraper or a car engine to a person who has never been able to see
- giving directions without visual references. How often do you say things like: 'When you get to the pub turn right', 'It's next to the Chinese takeaway'
- walking into a room where there are various groups of people talking and a radio interview playing - how do you know which is which? And how would you know if any of the conversation was directed at you? How would you know when to join in?

All this means that you'll need to work hard to put yourself in the student's shoes to understand her/his difficulties.

[8] A recommended piece of reading in this context would be the honest and moving account of John Hull's experience of becoming blind at age 45 - and the adaptions he had to make. Hull, John. *On sight and insight: a journey into the world of blindness*. One World, 1997.

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Project work

Why not find out more about the different types of visual impairment by . . .

- visiting your local society for the blind (You'll probably find this under charitable and voluntary organisations in the Yellow Pages)
- reading Section A of the *In Touch Handbook* - an excellent reference book which you may be able to get in the local library but, if not, why not suggest your Branch buys one? (You'll find publication details in **Resource 2**)
- Pages 17-22 (in the 1995-6 edition) have a series of colour pictures, showing a street scene as it might be perceived by people with a variety of different eye conditions
- borrowing or buying some simulation spectacles (see **Resource 1**). Try some of the following activities while wearing them:
  - Look around the room, noticing how much you can see
  - Identify which colours are easiest to distinguish/provide the greatest contrasts
  - Hold a conversation wearing them and identify what differences it makes
  - Experiment with different lighting conditions - does it help or hinder, for example, to have a reading lamp focused on the page? Is it best to sit by a window or in the shade?
  - Write your name and address
  - Dial a familiar telephone number
  - Watch a television programme or video
  - Read different types and print size of text (for example, newspapers, books, labels and packaging)
- borrowing books from the library about visual impairment to increase your knowledge and understanding of the major eye conditions
- talking to visually impaired students about their experiences.

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2 What are the implications for WEA field staff/Branches?

There are few adult learners who don't have some fears about returning to learn. For blind and partially sighted students, these concerns are multiplied by a number of additional hurdles which are, primarily, the responsibility of the Branch, including:

- **pre-course information**
- **gaining access to the building**
- **navigating the complexities of the building**
- **joining the group.**

In this chapter, a running case study describes the thoughts and experiences of a blind student, Alex[9], as he encounters these hurdles - moving from the point at which he hears about a class, to the point at which he enters the classroom.

> The case study is presented in a shaded box, like this one, followed by discussion of the main points in normal text.

Finally, you'll read about the **main issues for the tutor** in this case before being invited to undertake some research into policy issues for work in your own Branch/District.

Pre-course information and concerns

> I had come across information about the college's programme in the talking newspaper produced by the local society for the blind. Their development worker had also encouraged me to 'give it a go'.
>
> The literature for the course had not been very informative:
>
> > *'This is a course for beginners in woodcarving. Take this chance to acquire some new skills and to develop new designs in different forms of wood.'*
>
> 'Fat chance,' I thought. 'I'll be lucky to come back with all my fingers intact, never mind any wood carving.' The doorbell interrupted my thoughts. I walked across to the door and welcomed Denise, my friend from next door, who had volunteered to see me to the college and back.

[9] The case study used for this section was constructed from a conversation with a blind student who had experience of attending mainstream adult education courses.

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As we drove the three miles from home to the college, I wondered if the tutor knew that I was joining the class. Was he prepared for me? Would he give me the amount of attention I would need in the early stages? And how would the other students treat me? Would they be helpful and supportive, like most people I came in contact with, or would they resent any extra attention I received? How would I get to know them? What would they think of my disability?

The car bumped to a halt. This was it!

Alex's main concerns here lie with the adequacy of pre-course:

- **publicity/back-up information**
- **information exchange with the tutor.**

Publicity/back-up information

There are three main topics to consider here:

- where should courses be advertised?
- in what format should the materials be issued?
- what information should be given?

Branches who have made a policy commitment to encourage applications from visually impaired students will need to use publicity sources which are easily accessible to them.

In this case, Alex heard about the course through the local 'talking newspaper' (these are recorded on cassette and often available through the local society for the blind). Other alternatives might be local radio or TV stations. **Resource 2** will help you to identify useful contacts, with whom to discuss the best arrangements.

Resource 2

How else might you adapt your usual publicity materials (posters, leaflets, brochures, syllabus) and registration forms to make them accessible/useful to a wider range of potential students? Consider Alex's anxieties (and your own experiences in the simulation spectacles activities) and jot down your first thoughts about how to alleviate them before you read on.

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Feedback to exercise on previous page

You might:

- in an ideal world, publish the course brochure in larger than normal print or on tape. (Guidelines for producing appropriate print materials for students are given in **Resource 3**.) You'd also mention such availability in the standard brochure, to encourage sighted friends and family to pass on this information. However, this will normally be prohibitively expensive. An alternative would be to give your brochure to the local society for the blind, so that they can publicise it instead - recommending that they ask:
  - potential students to phone you for further details
  - students who do decide to come to the class, to enrol in advance so that you can do your best to accommodate their needs
- include information about special needs provision including access and support
- double-check the details for each course mentioned in the brochure - would you be able to tell, if you were visually impaired, whether the course was feasible for you? (For example, are video extracts or slides extensively used by the tutor?)
- emphasise where courses are particularly appropriate for visually impaired students (without falling into the stereotyping trap!)
- recommend that tutors with visually impaired students in their class make the course syllabus and reading lists available either:
  - in a suitable format (in large print, for example, or on cassette tape)
  - well in advance (so that the student can discuss it with friends/family members)

  Alternatively, they should allow time to read it to the student during a pre-course interview, if this can be arranged
- extend a welcome to visually impaired students and try to offer a pre-course meeting to identify concerns and sort out learning needs.

  (The pre-course enrolment form should also include this opportunity to clarify learning needs. However, for those students who just turn up for the course without registering in advance this is of less immediate use!)

Resource 3

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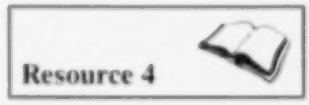
Information exchange between student, tutor and centre

It's a good idea to offer potential students a pre-course meeting with the tutor to discuss learning needs and strategies, and to allay anxieties. Obviously such a meeting will have resource implications for Branches and Districts. (It's crucial, too, to take every possible step to ensure that tutors have advance notice about the enrolment of blind or partially sighted students, so they can prepare for this!) The main topics for such a discussion are dealt with in Section 3, since this is primarily of concern to the tutor. It's mentioned here as one of the administrative procedures that need consideration.

In tandem with this pre-course interview, students with a severe impairment should be offered a guided tour of the building - so that they're acquainted with it before coming to the class. Guiding a blind or partially sighted adult is not a difficult skill to acquire and the RNIB method is outlined in **Resource 4**. This method allows you to give help at the level required by the blind person - leaving the blind person feeling in control, rather than simply in someone else's hands.

Most local societies for blind people offer short training courses in guiding blind and partially sighted adults. Branch members may find it useful to attend one of these or perhaps to arrange for on-site training so that a group of tutors, volunteers, field and administrative staff, can acquire these simple, common-sense skills. At least make sure people have read the guidelines in **Resource 4** and undertaken the quiz to check recall.



Alex's final concern was about the reaction of other students. However, it's best to ask the visually impaired student whether or not s/he would like other members to be informed about the impairment and what information s/he would like to share with them.

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Gaining access to the building

The car thumped to a halt. This was it - I was at the college. A thousand questions crossed my mind: Was this a great mistake? Could I find my way around? How would people receive me? Could I cope with the class? But it was too late to think about going back, Denise was already opening the car door. 'Come on,' she said. 'Let's be on the move!'

Swinging my legs out of the car door, I took her arm. She guided me into the college - describing, as she went, the route we were following, so that, despite my anxieties, I began to get a mental image of the building and its approaches. 'There are four steps now,' she said, 'and then we are at the door. Fortunately the woodcarving class is in the first main craft room which is only just down the corridor.'

We stopped at what Denise described as the main reception desk. 'Can I help you?' a polite voice asked. Denise explained that we were on our way to the wood carving class. 'Have you enrolled already?' the receptionist asked Denise. I sensed Denise turn to me, 'Did you fill in an application form, Alex?' she questioned. 'Nick filled it in for me,' I replied. 'Has he got the receipt number with him then?' came the voice from reception.

'No' I replied curtly. 'Oh! Well, I suppose I can find it,' said the voice. 'It will be in our records. By the way, did he let us know he was blind?'

By now I was feeling the tension. 'Your enrolment form asks about disability,' I responded. 'I assumed from that that you would know! Let's get down to the class.' I took hold of Denise's arm and together we walked along the corridor through quite a throng of people, towards the craft room door. For better or worse, I was here!

Most of us experience some apprehension as we enter large public buildings for the first time. All of us have experienced the 'gatekeepers' who occupy powerful positions and can make such a difference to our perceptions of the building and its occupants. Despite the recent attention to 'customer care', too often we are deterred by our first meeting with the administrative machine!

Alex's first concern is about **gaining physical access** to the college itself, then about becoming aware of its general approaches and layout. These would have been averted if the pre-course publicity had mentioned the possibility of a pre-course tutor meeting and guided tour (and delivered on these promises).

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The next problem is the '**gatekeeper**'. Although WEA field staff, Branches and tutors who are running classes in other organisation's premises usually have no direct responsibility for the gatekeeper, if they find that the official gatekeeper is not 'customer-friendly', then they ought to try and provide a trained meeter/greeter of their own. It's important to stamp out the patronising 'Does he take sugar?' approach which channels all questions and discussion through a third party.

Tied up with the gatekeeper problem is the **administrative hurdle** created for blind and partially sighted people by requirements such as form filling. Again, an initial contact meeting with the tutor would have alleviated this. In any case, it's important to ensure that the form is easy to read and includes the opportunity to describe any impairment so that the pre-course contact can be offered/set up. (All too often the form makes a general reference to disability without any direction to specify the type.) And remember those clear print guidelines (**Resource 3**) when you design forms. Make them as easy to read as possible and leave plenty of room for the student to write (and/or arrange for someone to help with their completion).

Access into the building itself, of course, is only the beginning of the journey . . .

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Navigating the complexities of the building

I took hold of Denise's arm and together we walked along the corridor through quite a throng of people, towards the craft room door. For better or worse, I was here! It was only then that I realised that in my panic to arrive I had forgotten to take my usual precaution of going to the toilet before I left home. There was no way in my current state that I would last through the class.

'Denise,' I said, 'find me the toilets.' For a moment I thought I sensed desperation or despair in her voice as she said, 'Oh! Alex.....' Then she gathered herself, 'OK, I'll ask.'

Quickly she found out what we needed to know. 'It's not far,' she said. 'Just a couple of doors and six steps to negotiate - but I can't come in with you! We'll just have to deal with that when we get there!'

Our journey was not without difficulty. The doors were difficult to pass through and the steps were inhabited by several young students who moved willingly when asked but seemed to have no anticipation of my difficulties. At last we reached the toilets and Denise was about to seek help when a young voice volunteered, 'Come on in with me. I'll see you're OK.'

All went well except for a moment of panic when I thought my new found friend was about to abandon me, lost in the depths of the college's urinal. I wasn't quite up to seeing the funny side of things at that point in time. Restored once more to Denise, we made our way back to the craft room. The moment of truth had arrived!

Blind and partially sighted students have just the same needs and entitlements as all other students. They'll need to visit the toilets, bar and other communal areas, so it's important to ensure that these are as accessible as possible. You will also need to be prepared for action in emergencies, perhaps in the event of fire.

Again, WEA field staff/Branches/tutors don't have direct control over the building and its facilities. So what could they do to improve access? Think about it - and jot down your first thoughts - before you turn over . . .

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Feedback to question on previous page

- It might be useful to undertake a survey of the building, to check out just how difficult it is to navigate - try it with the simulation spectacles if you're feeling really brave!

  A checklist for assessing accessibility (both into and around the building) is presented in **Resource 5**. Have a look at it now. There are so many simple things that can be done to help, even if total redecoration is a distant horizon. For example, the edges of stairs can be marked with coloured strips to provide contrast. Directional signs can be provided in large print and/or braille. Tactile markers of various kinds can be used to indicate different areas of the building. (When redecoration is on the horizon, you might advise on colour contrast and texture contrast to indicate different areas.) The RNIB provides advice on the use of colour and texture to improve mobility.

Resource 5

- On the basis of this survey, you might:
  - work towards influencing the managers of the building at any joint meetings
  - increase your efforts to recruit volunteer guides, if this is deemed necessary, and train them using **Resource 4** as a handout
  - contact local access groups which campaign for improved access for disabled people.

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Joining the group

The moment of truth had arrived. Here I was at the craft room, ready for my first try at woodcarving. It was a welcome relief to find that the tutor was expecting me. I was to discover later that she had received a hurried warning from reception while I had been on my toilet adventure!

Sheila, the tutor, spoke in a broad Yorkshire accent. She quickly introduced herself, sent Denise off to return for me at the end of the session and settled me into a space where I was comfy and felt some degree of security. I sensed that here was someone I could rely on.

I was quickly linked with the people on either side of me as we got to know each other in small groups and talked together about what we hoped to achieve in the class. Then Sheila skilfully drew us all into the discussion, making sure that I had my chance of a say!

It was clear that Sheila wanted us to be handling wood as soon as possible. The pattern she followed on that first evening became the established pattern for the future. First some discussion involving all of us, then Sheila's own contribution on a selected theme for the evening - usually short, knowledgeable and interesting - then a sustained spell of carving interspersed with a short break for coffee if we wanted it. The evening was rounded off with more discussion usually focusing on what we had been doing, noting our mistakes and achievements.

All this suited me fine as it gave me a degree of security - I knew what was coming next. My patience was tried a bit that first evening, because I had to wait while Sheila got the others going, but my turn came eventually. I was a bit concerned, then, that she gave me too much time. After all, the other students had paid for their share.

That first night Sheila apologised for the notes she gave me, promising to try to find something more appropriate in the future. As we left she called, 'See you next week'.

To a considerable extent, the tutor retrieved what might well have been a calamitous evening for Alex. The case study highlights some of the main issues:

- the importance of making all students feel welcome and at ease, and of taking steps to make sure that they knew each other. This was particularly important for Alex. As it turned out, the people Alex met at the class became good friends and were of enormous help as he progressed through the work

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- the need to provide cues to bring Alex into the discussion
- the importance of providing security and continuity
- the potential dangers for tutors in giving more time to one student than another. (Even in the obvious case of a blind student, other students may become resentful, though extra time spent on the first evening is likely to be acceptable.)

Many of these issues will crop up again in Section 3, which is primarily for tutors. All Branches and field staff, though, need to be aware of some of the simple rules for easing into relationships with visually impaired students. These are outlined in **Resource 6**.

Resource 6

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The main issues for the tutor

In the running case study for this section, the tutor only appears on the scene as the student appears at the class. It is clear from the information given that she knew nothing about having a blind student until just before the class began. Sheila's thoughts about the situation are worth recording.

I went home that evening feeling embarrassed and angry. No one had thought to mention that I would be having a blind student! How could they not have known?

If I had been forewarned, then I would at least have had the chance to discuss with Alex beforehand how things might work and whether both he and I could cope. As it was I had been flung in at the deep end, with no thought or preparation.

I hoped Alex hadn't realised how unprepared I was. What would the other students think? How much should they know?

As my anger subsided I thought over the evening again, and realised that it had been better than I'd first thought. At least I'd done some things right - though goodness knows, I'd had no special training for this. Still, I managed to apply some of the standard principles of good adult teaching.

What should I do next week? I needed to know more about Alex and the nature of his disability. I needed to get some feel for what he could manage and how he would best learn. I needed to be sure that he had a means of coming and going from the college and that when he arrived he got a better reception than he'd had tonight.

I also needed to think about my own teaching and the methods I employed. Could I be more imaginative? How can I put myself in his shoes? Surely there's some organisation that could give advice?

As I thought about it I began to get angry again. Someone at the college was going to get a piece of my mind tomorrow. How could they not have told me? Many of the things that had been crossing my mind were their responsibility. It wasn't for me to sort everything out. Come to think of it, Alex seemed to have sorted most of it out.

I decided I must find ten minutes at the end of the next lesson to check out with Alex how he felt he was progressing.

I drifted off to sleep.....

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As you can see, effective organisational backup is as important for the tutor as for the visually impaired student. The tutor's reactions confirm many of the points you have already learnt about in this and the previous section.

It's important, then, for Branches to:

- define, clearly, their policy about admission of visually impaired students - for example:
  - will they offer positive encouragement?
  - what type of provision will they offer? (The advantages and disadvantages of different models of provision - from separate classes to partnered provision, to integration into mainstream classes - have been described in the WEA survey[10])
  - what support services will they provide. For example, will there be:
    - for the student - help with fees, transport, mobility/access, pre-course preparation, learning support (provision of aids, for example, or volunteers to help with note-taking, recording), social support, careers and progression?
    - for the tutor - facilities, training, support and help with sharing of 'best practice'?
- Put into practice the arrangements necessary to achieve the aims of such a policy, including:
  - appropriate publicity methods and materials
  - appropriate resource allocation
  - administrative arrangements
  - channels of communication for visually impaired students to make their needs known
  - influence on the managers of buildings in which WEA courses are run - to bring about improved access
  - recruitment and training of volunteer guides
  - communication with, and training for, tutors
  - networking with local voluntary organisations.

[10] Payne R, Heinrich C P and Munby Z. *Visually Impaired Students and the Workers' Educational Association*. RNIB, 1997.

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Issues for the tutor form the subject of the next section.

Project work

You might want to find out more, now, about the ways in which your own Branch/college/centre manages the issues raised in this section. For example:

- What is the policy on the recruitment of visually impaired students?
- How is this policy translated into practice in terms of:
  - publicity (where is the course publicised and how user friendly is it?)
  - pre-course materials (Is there a variety of formats? Is there advice on arrangements for visually impaired students? Is there a named contact person?)
  - administrative requirements (Can the forms be easily used by visually impaired students, both for reading and writing purposes? Are there alternative arrangements for registering those who cannot use them?)
  - arrangements for pre-course meetings with the course tutor
  - provision of and training for 'meeters' and volunteer support staff/guides
  - assessment/improvement of access to the buildings in which courses are held
  - improving access to facilities within those buildings or, alternatively, searching for more appropriate accommodation
  - support/communication channels for students
  - support, advice and training for tutors.

You might also take the time to:

- talk with visually impaired students about their experience of the hurdles discussed in this section
- discuss access, guidance and awareness raising issues with your local society for the blind
- undertake some voluntary work with your local society.

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3 What does it mean for the WEA tutor?

> *'It helped to have a supportive tutor, who asked me **what I needed** in order to be fully involved and **what he could do** to make the experience better for me. Before each session he talked with me about the content and how we were going to work. He also spent time during the break, checking that I was getting on all right.'*

Section 2 dealt with the experiences of the visually impaired student in terms of the practicalities of getting as far as the first class. Now it's time to look more closely at the tutor's direct role in relation to the student.

In many respects, as Alex's tutor pointed out, it's simply a case of following good adult education principles. In particular, you might want to refer to the WEA's Learning Outcomes Strategy, which asks tutors to:

- *write a course syllabus that includes proposed learning outcomes*
- *discuss and agree the syllabus/learning outcomes with the students*
- *encourage and assist students to describe their learning and comment on the course*
- *review (a) individual and group learning achievements, and (b) students' course evaluations, then write a summary report.*

The standard managerial cycle, then - *Plan, Do, Check, Review* - could be translated as:

Plan:	• Write specific, measurable, learning outcomes • Take into account students' prior experience and preferred learning styles as you plan the structure/content/delivery of each session (including the preparation and use of appropriate learning resources)
Do:	Deliver the course
Check:	Make regular checks (within and between sessions) of student learning and adapt your approach accordingly
Review:	Make a post-course assessment of student achievements and your teaching methods/techniques (and share your learning/use it to plan the next course)

In this section we'll look at each of these stages of a course and how they might be affected by the presence, in your class, of students with a visual impairment.

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Write specific, measurable, learning objectives

This involves clarifying what, exactly, you would like students to be able to do as a result of studying your course. It is something which should not be affected by the presence of visually impaired students. The aim of inclusive education is to treat visually impaired students with the same respect as any other student.

Assume that anyone who signs up for a course which has a published syllabus/ learning outcomes feels capable of achieving them. You may make changes in your teaching methods to help them to achieve the objectives. You might also need to think carefully about how you can measure achievement. But you should not downgrade the objectives, unless a student specifically requests this for her/himself.

Take into account students' prior experience and preferred learning styles

In the normal run of things, you might publish the syllabus and learning outcomes and simply discuss this with students at the first session of the course. You'd ask people about their expectations of the course and about how much they already knew. You might, on the basis of this discussion, adjust your planned content/ structure accordingly.

If you know there is to be a student with a visual impairment in your class, though, it is desirable to have a detailed pre-course interview if at all possible. Look upon it as an opportunity to help the student:

- make a realistic self-assessment of her/his ability to achieve the objectives (and, if necessary, adapt these - so long as it's not an externally assessed course which demands fulfilment of specific criteria)
- inform you about their preferred learning methods and techniques
- make suggestions about the learning programme.

You should approach it as a journey of joint discovery, rather than a vehicle for making your own assessment and imposing your views. You'll need to be sensitive to their views and prepared to put aside your prejudices and stereotypes.

And what will you need to cover in this pre-course interview? On the basis of what you have learnt so far, jot down your first thoughts in the space below.

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The main points are summarised in **Resource 7** for future reference but let's summarise them here for continuity.

Resource 7

It's important to find out:

- their particular eye condition and the degree/type of vision remaining
- what this means in terms of organising the physical layout of the room to optimise, for example, lighting conditions for vision and guiding indicators for mobility. (Some of this was covered, for buildings, in Section 2, and particular classroom elements are covered in **Resource 10**)
- how realistic the student's objectives are, following a discussion of the course objectives and her/his prior experience
- what concerns they have and what type of support they might need from you/the WEA, bearing in mind their normal support network. Some students in the FEFC study[11] liked the idea of linking learning outcomes and the support needed through action plans for learning. These action plans can act as a kind of contract (documenting the expectations of both parties - you and the student - for each stage of the learning process)
- what teaching methods and materials they are familiar with and what works best for them. The offer of an innovative alternative that they might not have thought of may also be appropriate. Which leads into the . . .

Use of appropriate learning resources

There is now an extensive range of equipment available to help and support visually impaired people in the home, at work and in the classroom. The aids which you are most likely to use in the classroom fall into three main categories:

- **Aids which enhance the capacity to read print**
- **Tactile methods of reading**
- **Equipment which substitutes hearing for vision.**

[11] FEFC Committee Workshop - Evidence from students with disabilities. ABAPSTAS Conference, 11 March, 1995.

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Resource 8 gives a brief outline of the various aids and their availability, while **Resource 9** suggests ways to track down resources for particular courses. Remember that the student needs facilities for both:

- receiving information from you
- recording that information, in some way, for future reference.

Resources 8 & 9

Put yourself in the position of a visually impaired student now and comment on/suggest alternatives to the following traditional presentation methods.

Speaking from notes and using flipcharts to note the key points

Speaking to a pre-prepared handout

Use of visual aids such as overhead projectors, slides

Use of TV, radio and video

Use of artefacts (in archaeology, for example, or demonstration models in pottery)

The use of computers

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Feedback to exercise on previous page

Speaking from notes and using flipcharts to note the key points

If you experimented with the simulation spectacles, as part of your project work in Section 1, you'll have found that it's quite hard to pay attention for long periods of time when there is little or no visual contact. This is not an ideal method, then, for visually impaired students. There is not enough structure for them to 'hang' their learning on if they cannot read the flipchart. The speaker will need to recap much more frequently and make much more effort to involve students in the learning process - asking regular questions to clarifying the level of understanding which is being achieved. Providing a tape recorder for recording information - or pre-recorded cassettes so that students can 'read' the material before the course - would also help.

Speaking to a pre-prepared handout

Handouts can be useful and, in integrated courses (where handouts tend to be a regular feature), they may help the student to feel part of the group. (They also help the student to share her/his experience with family and friends.) Students may be able to:

- read them at home, with additional low vision aids
- ask members of the family or friends to read the handouts for them
- arrange for them to be translated into braille or read onto cassette.

*Remember to use the RNIB clear print guidelines (**Resource 3**) to prepare them.*

However, it's worth exploring the options for:

- increasing the print size of your handouts (having checked with the student first as large print is not helpful for all eye conditions)
- providing additional low vision aids in the classroom
- enlisting volunteer readers
- finding out what facilities there are locally (or through the RNIB) for translation of the handout into braille or Moon
- creating and having multiple copies of cassette tapes made, if the handouts contain a lot of written material
- providing handouts/cassettes of the reading material prior to the session so that students can come prepared.

In this way, everyone will have immediate access to the materials.

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Use of visual aids such as overhead projectors, slides

These are of little or no use to people with visual impairments:

- For written material you have the same problems as the flipchart (though the contrast and lighting will be improved, so the content may be easier to read)
- If the visual element of your message is paramount (photographs and other pictorial material for example) then, even if you describe it, you need to bear in mind the potential difficulty with visual concepts. (This is particularly true for those who have been visually impaired from birth.)

We have seen excellent examples of tutors preparing cassette tapes to support their work. For example, a tutor teaching a course on travelling in Latin America taped her journey as a series of 'sound photographs' of street life in cities, music, wildlife and people that she met. Another tutor recorded her husband describing his work on a farm, in a course charting a shepherd's life. Birdsong recordings have been used in natural history classes. There is a wealth of recorded material available, and many libraries now have large collections of audiotapes.

Use of TV, radio and video

If you can find radio, TV and video programmes relevant to your course of study, these are usually worth adding to your Recommended 'Reading' List.

You need not necessarily rule out using pre-recorded TV programmes or videos as teaching aids. Even totally blind students, or those with very low vision can learn from an informative sound track if the sound quality is good. You might also 'speak to the blank spaces', providing your own commentary at points where the video has no useful sound.

Use of artefacts (in archaeology, for example, or demonstration models in pottery)

The use of artefacts and tactile materials is often helpful, for example:

- Natural materials can be felt in natural history courses
- Items from the local museum can be borrowed for history classes
- Tactile maps in raised line form have been made for exploring local history
- 'Before' and 'after' examples can be provided in practical subjects, (such as woodcarving, pottery, sculpture) so that students can sense how their work might progress. For example, woodcarving tutors might provide examples of the different stages, from the unplaned timber to the finished carved article in wood.

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Some tutors have been very inventive. For example:

- an archaeology tutor built Roman baths with his students in Lego (see front cover)
- a tutor on a course in complementary therapies made tactile diagrams of feet, using sandpaper on card, to illustrate the position of the pressure points used in reflexology

However, don't fall into the stereotype trap of assuming that blind people must have excellent tactile perception. This is not necessarily the case. Sufferers from diabetes, for example (a common cause of blindness in later life) often have a poor sense of touch.

The use of computers

Many of the interactive training packages available will have limited usefulness for visually impaired students since they usually rely on a fair amount of reading and the size of print is often not enlarged/open to editing.

However, computers can be used in a variety of ways to present information:

- written material scanned in to the machine can then be edited into a size and format which is more easily read by them
- the computer screen can also be 'read' using a speech synthesiser or an electronic braille display
- there are screen magnification systems which increase the size of the image displayed in the screen, but only a portion at a time.

Some of these features are available as software on floppy disks, others require the insertion of a circuit board into the PC.

While access to advanced technology by students in higher and, to some extent, in further education is opening up fairly rapidly, the complexity and cost of equipment, and the bewildering range of options, mean that these benefits are not generally available.

Unfortunately, the position is worse for visually impaired students as the move to the graphical interface of Windows has hindered, rather than helped them. You'll need to:

- keep abreast of technical developments. (A starting point is the RNIB's excellent set of factsheets with regularly updated details about specialist equipment and software, suppliers and training opportunities, available from the Employment Development and Technology Unit at Head Office. You can find their address in **Resource 2**)
- investigate the options for pooling or borrowing equipment. Remember, there are bonuses to be gained from making new contacts and partnerships!

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Deliver the course

There are two main elements to this. You'll need to:

- Optimise the physical layout of the room
- Manage the communication and learning process.

Optimise the physical layout of the room

General issues of access within the building have already been dealt with in Section 2. However, it will be your responsibility as a tutor to optimise the physical conditions for learning within the classroom. On the basis of what you have learnt already, what do you think you could do? Jot down your thoughts in the space below before you turn to **Resource 10** for feedback.

Resource 10

Manage the communication and learning process

In each session you'll be doing your best to ensure that:

- your students achieve the learning objectives you've set for that session (the task)
- the learning process is a positive experience (the process).

We've already talked about the resources/methods you might use to help achieve your learning objectives. But you'll also need to bear in mind the specific communication needs of the visually impaired student, which arise because:

- it's harder to concentrate, for long periods of time, when you have sight problems
- without sight, you can't pick up important non-verbal clues that sighted people take for granted. People with visual impairments might, therefore, come across as insensitive - for example, they may:
  - 'interrupt' because they can't distinguish between a pause which means the person has finished speaking and a pause for thought before finishing the sentence (conversely, they may not join in for similar reasons)
  - keep talking too long, because they can't read the signals that listeners are fed up or would like to put in a comment of their own.

So what differences might these considerations make to the way you run your class?

Think for yourself for a while before you read on.

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For the **concentration** problem, it's important to:

- break your main lesson plan down into shorter steps than usual and summarise key points more often. (Students also find it useful if you review the previous week's lesson at the beginning of each session and review the current session at the end of the class. It's the traditional formula of: *'Tell them what you're going to cover, cover it, tell them what you've covered'.*)
- make more effort to run an interactive session rather than doing all the talking yourself. Encourage everyone to contribute their ideas and don't forget to address everyone by name, so that the person with a visual impairment can hear who is being addressed and learns to recognise the voices. A roll call each session might be useful too.
- be even more alert to any non-verbal signals that attention is drifting and change your tempo or style accordingly.

For the **lack of non-verbal clues/ potential perceived 'insensitivity'** problem, you may need to brush up on your general skills in managing the flow of conversation in the group. Make sure everyone has a chance to have their fair say - bringing people in and closing them down, tactfully, as required.

Remember, what Alex said about the importance of security and continuity - make sure that the student has the same people on either side of her/him each week. (Choose, for this purpose, people who are most likely to be supportive - providing friendship during coffee breaks, for example.)

Be aware, too, of the class as a social meeting place for visually impaired students and provide opportunities for talk between individuals and in small groups.

In addition to the above, we know that in classes of older adults you are likely to encounter students who are also **deaf or hard of hearing**. Tutors need then to develop their communication skills with students with a dual sensory disability. Two publications give tutors specific advice on working with deaf and hard of hearing adults.[12]

Local societies for the blind may be able to loan a loop system or radio microphone system. If using such equipment, ensure it is working and that both you and the student know how it works and are comfortable with the arrangements before sessions begin.

[12] *WEA Deafness and Hearing Impairment: Access guidelines and Adult Education Perspectives*. WEA, 1993 and Jones L, *Education and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adults: a handbook*. NIACE, 1993.

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The key points are summarised in **Resource 11**.

Resource 11

You might also choose to read the WEA survey report[13] in which a number of tutors - on a variety of courses - describe the ways in which they have adapted their traditional teaching methods to encompass the needs of visually impaired students.

Make regular checks on student progress and adapt your approach accordingly

As a tutor you need to know whether your methods are working. Any blocks to learning during the early stages of the course may result in the student falling behind and having difficulty in regaining lost ground. No-one likes to admit they are having problems and for the visually impaired student this may be even more difficult. S/he may:

- fear that their 'slippage' will be perceived as a lack of ability on their part, rather than a failure on your part to meet their needs
- be reticent about criticising your teaching methods and materials, particularly if you've been welcoming and supportive
- worry about taking up too much of your time and causing resentment among other students.

Conversely, they will not want you to 'let them off' - immediately putting any lack of progress down to their visual impairment. They are human too and just as likely to be lazy, disorganised, over-stretched as any other student. Again, it's a question of following good teaching and review techniques. Find out what the reasons are - don't make assumptions!

The WEA Learning Outcomes Strategy asks you to check out progress towards the middle of a 10 week course, (and perhaps twice or three times in a longer course) by referring students back to the proposed learning outcomes and course content set out in the syllabus and asking them, 'How are we doing so far?'

13 Payne R, Heinrich C P and Munby Z. *Visually Impaired Students and the Workers' Educational Association*. RNIB, 1997.

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In a targeted class (visually impaired students only), a progress review is likely to be handled as a group discussion within class time. In a mainstream class, with only one or two visually impaired students, you might want to take them aside and review their learning separately. Check it out with them though. They might not want to be seen as separate. Remember, though, if you do meet after class, you'll need to be aware of potential transport problems.

So what would you cover in a progress review? The key points are summarised in **Resource 12** - but try to work it out yourself, before you look it up.

Resource 12

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Post-course assessment of student achievements and your teaching methods/techniques

There are two elements to this:

- internal assessment (evaluation of learning outcomes by you and the students)
- assessment for accredited courses and the arrangements which can be made for visually impaired students.

Internal assessment

Traditionally, liberal adult education classes gave little formal acknowledgement to students' learning. The main emphasis was on the course content and the tutor's teaching. Any discrepancy between what the student was intended to learn and what s/he actually learnt would have been put down to the students learning ability, rather than the quality of the teaching.

The Learning Outcomes Strategy has changed the emphasis. There is now a *Description of Learning and Course Evaluation* form. You would normally distribute this to students towards the end of the course, asking them to describe:

- *how far they think they have achieved the proposed learning outcomes*
- *what else they think they have gained from the course*
- *what further studies they might undertake and/or how they might use their newly acquired knowledge and skills*
- *their overall impressions of the course (a course evaluation).*

The form is normally completed at home before the last session, or during the final meeting. If you have visually impaired students in the class then you'll need to make other arrangements - similar to those you've learnt about in other parts of this guide. For example, you might:

- work with them to complete their forms, if there are only one or two (either in class or over the phone)
- arrange for the form to be prepared in large print (for those who can read large print)
- ask the student to complete it with her/his befriender/mentor/volunteer
- in a class where all the students are visually impaired, talk through the form and run a group discussion, whilst you (or a volunteer) take notes or tape the discussion for writing up later.

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All these methods have been piloted by tutors working in the East Midland District as part of the piloting of the Learning Outcomes Strategy. There are obviously advantages and disadvantages for each of these different approaches. Some were clearly 'resource hungry' - having plenty of volunteers present or being able to phone all students were not options that were always available. Working through group discussion left open the possibility of the tutor 'prompting' responses particularly because of the issues, discussed earlier, of group communication skills and a reluctance to discuss problems publicly.

Once you have this feedback on record, using whatever method seems most appropriate to your circumstances, complete your report in the normal way, simply noting the circumstances by which you obtained your students' judgements and descriptions.

Don't forget to share your learning with other tutors and use it to plan the next course!!

Assessment for accredited courses

The number of externally accredited courses offered by WEA Districts (for example, GCSE, OCR and City and Guilds) has risen sharply in recent years.

Most of these courses make provision for alternative assessment methods for students with different types of impairment - including visual impairment.

These arrangements include:

- the use of a reader to read assignments to the student
- someone to write, on their behalf (called an amanuensis)
- the use of cassette tapes to deliver questions and record answers
- question papers presented in large print, braille or Moon
- the availability of a keyboard to produce typescript or raised type answers
- extra time allowance (normally 25%)
- other mechanical or electronic aids.

The aim is to compensate for the impairment without giving unfair advantage.

If you want the examining board to produce papers in alternative formats you will have to give at least two months notice. You need to give this amount of notice anyway just to get approval for the student to receive any of the above forms of support.

For more details, you'll need to contact the Examining Board. Each publishes a brochure with guidance on what arrangements can be made and how to apply.

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Well, that more or less wraps up this section - just the project work, now.

Project work

Why don't you . . .

- spend some time imagining how you would feel as a visually impaired student attending your current course, as it stands - what difficulties might you encounter?
- explore the initial assessment procedures of other organisations which work with people with disabilities
- set out the learning objectives for the course you tutor and identify the implications for possible integration of visually impaired students
- investigate the possibilities for the loan of equipment or support for students who need alternative media
- work out the best layout for your current classroom
- arrange to visit other classes with visually impaired students to see how colleagues use their imagination in tailoring their course to the needs of visually impaired students
- suggest a meeting at which tutors can discuss best practice in the areas of:
  - setting objectives
  - identifying resources
  - course delivery
  - progress review
  - course assessment
- investigate the extent of and provision for visual impairment within your own class or those offered by your Branch, using the questionnaire in **Resource 13** as a starter.

Resource 13

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4 A trainer's perspective

The Further Education Funding Council's Committee on Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, in their report *'Inclusive Learning'* (the Tomlinson report)[14] highlighted the fact that existing levels of training, for teachers working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are not sufficient and urgently need improvement.

The RNIB have developed an NOCN accredited course, *Initial training in working with visually impaired people*, which will be available nationally. They also currently offer an OCR/RNIB *Tutor's Certificate in the context of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. For further information, contact: RNIB Post-16 Policy Unit, PO Box 49, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3DG. Tel: 01509 265491.

Within the WEA, there are few formal opportunities for adult tutors to develop their skills in this special area of work. This is not surprising since a national training strategy for part-time tutors is still developing and, as provision in this area of work is not extensive, practitioners are spread widely and thinly around the country.

In this section you'll be introduced to:

- **a training model which has been used successfully in Leicester**
- **other suggestions for running training events.**

A training model which has been used successfully in Leicester

In **Resource 14**, you'll find a suggested model for a one-day, staff development event. The model includes the introductory handout (with learning outcomes and the programme for the day), the trainer's lesson plan and some suggestions for running the course.

The model is based on an event which has been organised successfully for WEA part-time tutors in Leicester and which is co-tutored by the WEA tutor organiser and staff from the Royal Leicestershire, Rutland and Wycliffe Society for the Blind. It is held at the Society's purpose-built Resources Centre and gives tutors an opportunity to explore the facilities and equipment available at the centre.

[14] Tomlinson, J. *Inclusive Learning: The Report of the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee to the Further Education Funding Council*. HMSO, 1996.

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Seeking partners in such training ventures is highly recommended because:

- it's a practical solution to the problem of relatively small numbers of likely participants in any geographic area
- it makes the most use of complementary skill sets:
  - WEA tutor trainers can contribute their expertise in adult teaching, and the imagination to apply and develop that discipline in a specialised area of work
  - However, we need to work with people with expertise in the field of visual impairment education. Potential contacts are suggested in Resource 2 and, wherever possible, try to work with trainers who are themselves blind or partially sighted.

The model in **Resource 14** takes about 5 hours, minimum, if you take 45 minutes for lunch. The model could be adapted by removing the simulation exercise and the video session, for example, which would allow the event to take place in one session of approximately 2 1/2 hours.

Resource 14

Other suggestions for running training events

You might use this pack as the basis for training events, including:

- an open learning/self study course - with some tutorial support and a workshop session, where participants come together to undertake some of the exercises suggested in the pack (for example, using simulation spectacles) and to see the video/use a range of learning aids
- a series of workshops, with attendance on the basis of role (for example, Branch members and field staff to sessions based on Sections 1, 2 and 4, tutors to sessions based on Sections 1, 2 and 3). Many of the papers in the Resources section could be used as handouts but, again, for the contacts and the learning aids there is no substitute for the real thing - try to borrow as wide a range as possible and invite some local contacts along
- equal opportunities training, choosing particular sections to complement the WEA equal opportunities training pack, *Learning to change*[15].
- disability awareness training.

[15] Bob Payne and Cheryl Turner. *Learning to change*. WEA, 1997

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Whichever you choose, you should try to:

- ***encourage as many part-time tutors as possible to attend events aimed at tutors:***
    - Part-time tutors, whatever the course, have little opportunity to meet to discuss and share their expertise. This is a good opportunity for them to make contact with people engaged in similar work and share their experience
    - It's also an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the range of specially designed educational aids as a precursor to creative thinking about the use of different teaching methods and materials
- ***make sure that people develop personal action plans.***

If training is to be of any value, it must lead to some change in practice. Action plans might include:

- visits to colleagues/ the development of some kind of network
- visits to local societies to find out more about resources and methods
- plans to improve access
- curriculum planning.

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Note: Training videos are listed separately at the end of **Resource 1**.

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Resource 1 - Common eye conditions

Description of eye condition	Effect on vision
Albinism A lack of pigment (melanin) in the body, including the eyes, results in: • the iris being unable to control light entering the eyes • the retina having no black pigment to absorb the light.	Extreme sensitivity to bright light. (see also nystagmus)
Cataracts These may be congenital but can also result from age, injury or disease. Cataracts can develop gradually or suddenly and, either way, part or all of the lens of the eye loses its transparency.	A cataract obscures vision in the part of the field of view that it covers. If the cataract covers the whole lens, then: • there is a general loss of colour vision, (though red is often distinguishable) • outlines are dimmed • there is a problem of glare - particularly in sunshine • the effect is worst in the centre of the field of vision and objects here tend to merge into their background.
Glaucoma A major cause of loss of vision in/after middle age, glaucoma is caused by raised pressure inside the eye, when the aqueous humour drains away more slowly than it is produced. In chronic glaucoma, development of symptoms is gradual. In acute glaucoma, it is sudden. When glaucoma is poorly controlled, or untreated, the optic nerve and retina will be damaged.	Glaucoma results in: • a gradual narrowing of the field of vision (this is probably best described as losing the ability to see out of the corners of the eyes) • this eventually leads to 'tunnel vision' (You might compare it to looking through a keyhole. Alternatively, it's like being able to read a car number plate without being able to make out the rest of the car.) Eventually, the retina can lose all function causing total blindness.

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Description of eye condition	Effect on vision
Hemianopia Caused by damage to the part of the brain dealing with vision (perhaps as a result of a stroke, an accident, or a tumour). The effect on sight varies widely, depending on the degree and severity of damage to the brain.	Sight loss is dramatic and effectively cuts the field of vision in half. The side lost will depend on which side of the brain is damaged.
Macular disease The condition is associated with ageing (although there are rare forms which affect young people) and it is often known as macular degeneration or ageing maculopathy. There is a loss of function in the macula, a minute area in the central part of the retina which is responsible for: • what we see straight in front of us • the vision needed for detailed activity • our ability to appreciate colour.	• Central vision is lost, gradually, leading to a blank patch in the centre of the person's sight • The eyes may be sensitive to light • Peripheral vision always remains and is still usable but training is needed to use the peripheral vision more effectively (It's no use turning your gaze to the periphery - where details appears clearer - because the central vision loss turns with you) • The ability to see fine detail goes and close up work is very difficult (Trying to look closely at something, such as print or the eye of a needle, makes it distorted or invisible).
Nystagmus This condition is often associated with albinism and congenital cataract. Both eyes flicker, usually horizontally.	The effect has been described as delivering vision like a blurred photograph.
Optic atrophy Loss of function in the optic nerve (for example, through head injuries). The eyes may work normally, but messages don't reach the brain.	• Total atrophy means no messages reach the brain from the affected eye, and loss of vision is total • Partial atrophy causes field defects, depending on which nerve fibres, from which parts of the retina, are damaged.

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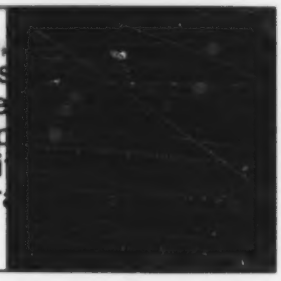
Description of eye condition	Effect on vision
Ptosis A drooping eyelid, caused by a nerve or muscle defect.	Obscuring of vision (because it blocks the rays entering the lens). In children, it will affect visual development.
Retinal problems:	
• **Diabetic retinopathy** is a major cause of visual impairment amongst working age adults. A side effect of diabetes, there is damage to the retina caused by bleeding or the formation of new blood vessels in the retina.	The degree of damage varies considerably from person to person and may or may not be permanent. Key symptoms: • Patches of vision are lost throughout the visual field • Within these patches, all vision is degraded or lost • Outside the patches, vision is normal • In some cases, there is complete loss of sight.
• **CMV retinitis** is an AIDS-related condition which can occur when the immune system is damaged, allowing the CMV virus to attack the retina and, less commonly, other parts of the eye.	There are similarities both with retinal diseases and cataracts, since it affects similar parts of the eye: • Eyesight becomes blurred • Colour vision is diminished - the last colours to disappear tend to be blue and yellow.
• **Retinitis Pigmentosa** is an inherited condition, resulting in progressive loss of retinal function, starting at the perimeter and moving towards the centre (usually in early adulthood).	Initially, the main symptom is reduction of vision in low light conditions. This progresses to tunnel vision. Both eyes are affected.
• **Detached retina** - the retina becomes detached, progressively, from the back of the eye, as holes form at its edge.	When the retina is completely detached all vision in the eye is lost. Sometimes, even if the retina is re-attached, vision may not be totally regained - particularly if the detachment occurred in the region of the macula (used for detailed vision).

© Royal Institute for the Blind 1999

In macular disease, central vision is lost, gradually leading to a blank patch in the person's field of vision. The person may be sensitive to light and central vision always remains usable, but training is needed to use it effectively. The ability to see detail goes and close up work is very difficult.

Glaucoma results in tunnel vision compared to looking through a keyhole.

With hemianopia, the loss is dramatic and cuts the person's vision in half. The extent of vision varies widely, depending on the extent and severity of the damage to the brain.



The key symptoms of diabetic retinopathy include:

- patches of vision lost throughout the field of vision
- within these patches, all sight is lost
- outside the patches, vision is normal

Cataracts

These may be congenital but can also result from age, injury or disease. Cataracts can develop gradually or suddenly and either only part or all of the lens of the eye loses its transparency.

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On the basis that a picture is worth a thousand words, we strongly recommend that you try to get hold of:

- *Eye to Eye*, a set of slides published by RNIB Book Sales Service. A selection of these slides has been reproduced with permission from RNIB for the National Association for use in training sessions in Districts. They are available from the Education Officer at National Office with accompanying notes for trainers.
- The *In Touch 1995-96 Handbook* for Section A which includes a series of photographs of a street scene, each of which simulate a different eye condition. Details available from RNIB Customer Services (whose address is in **Resource 2**).
- *A Challenging Vision*, a ten minute promotional video from RNIB. Aims to challenge misconceptions about blindness and includes brief simulations of sight loss and personal views from people of all ages. Loan copies available from RNIB Public Information Service (£3.00 for two weeks). Tel: 0171 388 1266.
- *Seeing it our way*, a seventeen-minute video in which visually impaired people describe the misconceptions sighted people have about what it is to be blind or partially sighted, what helps, what hinders and basic guiding skills. This is a very useful Australian video distributed in the UK by Boulton-Hawker Films Ltd, Hadleigh, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 5BG. Tel: 01473 822235. It costs £57.58. A loan copy is available from the Education Officer at National Office.
- *See what I mean*, a seven-minute video to introduce sighted people to some everyday problems of living with a visual impairment. This is available at £17.50 from: Visual Impairment North East, c/o Fred Hodson, 52, Linskill Terrace, North Shields, Tyne and Wear NE30 2EW. Tel: 0191 257 4388. A loan copy is available from the Education Officer at National Office.
- Simulation spectacles, a set of ten goggles simulating the effects of various eye conditions including: glaucoma, hemianopia, cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. These can be purchased from the same address as *See what I mean*. A loan set is available from the Education Officer at National Office.
- RNIB simulation spectacles (one type only, £1 per pair) which simulate blurred and patchy vision. Available from RNIB Customer Services.

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Resource 2 - Useful contacts

Local organisations

A substantial resource of expertise and experience is available through:

- **local societies for blind and partially sighted people**, including support groups (you could look under charitable and voluntary organisations in a Yellow Pages directory)
- **social services departments** and their specialist staff (for example, there are mobility officers who could arrange to explore routes between home and college - and to tour the building with a new student)
- **local education authorities**, where there may be:
  - an adult education specialist
  - a visual impairment service in the schools sector of the education department.
- **specialist resource centres**, which blind and partially sighted people can visit to receive help, advice and support. Many areas now have such centres - usually run by local voluntary agencies or social services - and they are often helpful in dealing with education queries too. If you haven't found one through the voluntary or statutory social services, the following publication has a detailed list of them, together with information about opening times and services available.

The In Touch Handbook

The *In Touch Handbook, 1995-96* isn't exactly a 'contact' but it's a highly recommended treasury of information (and a source of contacts). It was published for BBC Radio 4 by In Touch Publishing. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, there are no plans to update this last edition and remaining print copies are being sold at the reduced price of £10. They are available until supplies run out from RNIB Customer Services.

The handbook provides a list of **useful addresses** which includes:

- specialist organisations which deal with particular facets of visual disability (for example, Association of Blind Asians, the British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society)
- organisations which have visual disability as one of many interests (for example, Age Concern, Foundation for Communication for the Disabled).

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National organisations

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

RNIB has staff based around the country. Your most important contacts are likely to be:

RNIB department	Services provided
Customer Services PO Box 173 Peterborough Cambs., PE2 6WS Tel: 0345 023153	• Customer service and useful RNIB publications, including: - *Your guide to RNIB services* for visually impaired people and professionals - The *RNIB publications catalogue* (listing useful leaflets and books, some of them free, which will improve your understanding of visual impairment) - *The RNIB Catalogue of Products* (providing details of the aids available for the visually impaired to improve life at home, at work and in the classroom) - *UK organisations for blind and partially sighted people* • Details of RNIB facilities for producing **tactile maps and diagrams**
Talking book service Tel: 0345 626843	Holds over 10,000 titles. Talking Books is a membership organisation, with a 1999 - 2000 subscription rate of £54.
Head office 224 Great Portland St. London, W1N 6AA Tel: 0171 388 1266	This houses many of the organisation's advice and development units - for example: • the Employment Development and Technology Unit, which has compiled a series of factsheets on aids and apparatus used for work and study • the Ethnic Minorities Development Officer
RNIB Student Support Service PO Box 49 Loughborough Leics., LE11 3DG Tel: 01509 211995	For details of your nearest student support adviser. (The RNIB has a network of student support centres where more specialised help is available.)

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Partially Sighted Society

Can supply heavily lined paper for students with low vision to write on.

Partially Sighted Society, Queens Road, Doncaster DN1 2XA. Tel: 01302 323132.

Calibre

Calibre (free membership for blind and partially sighted people) will loan books - recorded on standard audiocassettes - to visually impaired people. It is also possible for subscribing organisations to borrow up to four books at a time, at a cost of £35. Calibre has local and national Branches - contact:

Calibre, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP22 5XQ. Tel: 01296 432339.

Talking Newspaper Association of the UK

Can supply details of local talking newspapers - contact:

Talking Newspaper Association of the UK, 90 High St., Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 8JD. Tel: 01435 866102

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Skill aims to empower people with any kind of disability to realise their potential in further, continuing and higher education, training and employment. Skill works by providing information and advice to individuals, promoting good practice and influencing policy in partnership with disabled people, service providers and policy makers.

Skill, 4th Floor, Chapter House, 18-20 Crucifix Lane, London SE1 3JW.
Tel: voice/text 0171 450 0620. Information Service: Tel: 0800 328 5050.

And don't forget the organisations mentioned at the end of **Resource 1**.

Organisations for students with multiple handicaps

Sense

Sense is the national voluntary organisation which provides services, advice, support and information for **deafblind children and young adults**, their families and professionals in the field. It can provide training for work in this area and will work with other organisations to provide services. Further information can be obtained from:

Sense, 11-13, Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, London N4 3SR.
Tel: 0171 272 7774 (voice) 0171 272 3260 (minicom).

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Deafblind UK

This is a national voluntary organisation whose members are **deafblind adults**. It provides a range of services including welfare, advice and training. Its head office is at:

> Deafblind UK, 100 Bridge Street, Peterborough, Cambs PE1 1DY.
> Tel and minicom: 01733 358100. Qwerty: 01733 358858

The British Deaf Association

The BDA is involved with Sense in developing services and awareness about **deafblindness**, especially Usher's Syndrome. Its address is:

> BDA, 1-3 Worship Street, London EC2A 2AB.
> Tel: 0171 588 3520 (voice) or 0171 588 3529 (minicom).

The RNIB Information and Practice Development Service on Multiple Disability

This division of the RNIB provides information to staff and carers of adults who have both a learning disability and a visual impairment. It:

- produces a series of helpful factsheets and a newsletter, *Focus*
- organises workshops or talks
- responds to individual requests for information.

> RNIB Information and Practice Development Service on Multiple Disability
> Tel: 0171 388 1266.

Training opportunities for those working with adults with multiple impairments

The RNIB provide:

- a short course programme
- tailor-made courses for individual organisations or services
- a new course leading to the RNIB Certificate in Multiple Disability. This course is designed to be delivered by an organisation's own training officer, thus offering flexible, comprehensive training.

For information contact:

> RNIB Multiple Disability Training Service, 7 The Square, 111 Broad Street, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 1AS. Tel: 0121 643 9912

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Resource 3 - Clear print guidelines

1. Introduction

Good standards of print legibility help all readers but, for many people with a visual impairment, the issue is crucial to whether they read or not. It is important to recognise that blind and partially sighted people have different eye conditions and what they see can greatly differ. It is, therefore, impossible to devise a print standard that will meet all needs. These guidelines[16] simply aim to describe a few inexpensive, common sense steps which can easily be taken.

2. Contrast

An important factor affecting print legibility is the contrast between the type and the paper on which it is printed (or photocopied). Contrast is affected by:

- ***paper colour***
- ***printing inks***
- ***type size, font and weight.***

Without doubt publishers can best help blind and partially sighted people by paying attention to this very simple aspect of print legibility.

Paper colour

Black type on white or yellow paper gives a very good contrast. If you wish to use paper in other colours, or to print text on top of tints, the background colours selected must be very pale.

[16] These guidelines are based on *See it right: new approaches to information for blind and partially sighted people*, RNIB, 1993.

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Printing inks

For best contrast:

- Printing ink, if not black, should be **as dark as possible** (for example greens, blues, reds or browns can be acceptable, if dark ink is used and the background is very pale)
- **Never use yellow** printing inks - they are almost invisible
- **Avoid pale colours on coloured backgrounds**
- **Don't** be tempted to **run type across an illustration** - it limits the contrast and confuses the eye
- **Reversals** (white type on black or another dark colour, for example) **are acceptable, provided that the typeface, size and weight are suitable**. (Avoid reversing out small type sizes and light type faces because these tend to fill in with ink and become indistinct.) Some blind and partially sighted people prefer reversed-out type, if the size and weight are adequate.

Type size, font and weight

Size can significantly improve legibility.

Print size is described in *points*. For the general reader, point type sizes between 8 and 10 are frequently used (illustrated overleaf). These print sizes are not legible enough for many readers, including, of course, blind and partially sighted people. The RNIB:

- aims to produce documents intended for *general readers* using 12 point. This is the size of print to which we believe others should also aspire
- recommends a **minimum of 14 point for material intended for blind and partially sighted readers** - a significant proportion of whom can read large print

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- **often uses 16 point** type when producing information for blind and partially sighted readers - many of whom (though not all) need a type size larger than 14 pt. There appears to **be no advantage in going above 20 point** (except for headings) but it's difficult to be prescriptive in this area, as factors such as typeface and type weight will also be relevant to any decision on type size.

Sans serif types (the ones without the curly bits on the ends of letters), such as Arial, Helvetica and Univers, **are easier to read** and it's best to use them whenever possible. (These guidelines are set in 14 point Helvetica)

Point sizes and fonts are illustrated in the following table:

Point sizes	**Fonts** **(Note: These all 14 point, but note different sizes!)**
8 point	Arial
10 point	Gill Sans
12 point	Helvetica
14 point	Courier
16 point	Times New Roman

Type weight is almost as important as size in determining legibility. Light typefaces should be avoided, especially in smaller sizes. Blind and partially sighted people may need **medium or bold** type weights. Even 'regular' weights may provide inadequate contrast between the type and the background.

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3. Numbers

Make sure any numerals are as distinct as possible. Blind and partially sighted people can easily misread 3, 5, and 8 in some typefaces, and even 0 and 6.

4. Word spacing

Stick to **even word spacing**. Don't condense or stretch lines of type or, worse, single words, to fit your line length

RNIB prefers to use **unjustified right hand margins** - it is felt that this is helpful to blind and partially sighted people

5. Line spacing

Leave reasonable space between lines of type. (These guidelines are set with 1.25 line spacing, rather than single line)

6. Line length

This should, ideally, be in the range of **50 - 65 characters**. Blind and partially sighted people may prefer even shorter lines than this.

A**void splitting words** at the ends of lines.

7. Paper

Avoid:

- **glossy paper** (art paper) because it reflects too much light
- **very thin, semi-transparent paper** which can also cause problems, because text can show through from the reverse.

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8. Capital letters

These are harder to read than lower case letters. Although a word or two in capitals may present no serious difficulties, **avoid capitals for continuous text**.

9. Design and layout

This is very important as many readers are easily daunted by a page of close-set type - **space** is important to break up the text:

- Keep it simple and clear
- Leave extra space between paragraphs
- Don't cram the page

On forms, it is worth noting that blind and partially sighted people often need generous space to fill in any hand-written details, because their writing tends to be larger than average.

It also helps to **provide 'navigational' aids** for the reader, for example:

- a contents list
- clearly differentiated headings
- rules (like the one below) to separate unrelated sections

You should also:

- **avoid fitting text round illustrations** (which results in different line lengths)
- **make sure the margin** (in text set in vertical columns) clearly **separates the two columns**. (If space is limited, use a vertical rule.)

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Resource 4 - How to guide a blind person

Introduction

There are times when blind and partially sighted people need help from sighted people in getting around. Even people who are very good at travelling alone or with a guide dog welcome help sometimes. These notes, extracted from a leaflet published by RNIB[17], are for anyone who acts as a sighted guide and is intended to give you practical tips for coping in most situations. The term 'blind' is used as shorthand for both blind and partially sighted people.

Let's go

After you've introduced yourself, ask the blind person **where** she wants to go and **how** she would like to be guided. Some blind people will take your arm, others prefer you to take their arm. A few don't like being touched at all and need verbal guidance or some other method. In these notes we give advice for guiding someone who holds your arm because this is how blind and partially sighted people are trained to use a sighted helper. Not everyone gets training, however, which is one reason why you should ask first.

If there's room to walk side by side, stand next to the blind person and let her take hold of your arm just above your elbow. You can keep your arm pointing downwards or you can bend it, as long as you keep your upper arm straight. By walking hand to arm this way the blind person will be half a pace behind you, making it easier to tell when you are turning, by the movement of your body.

If the person has a guide dog, you should approach from the side opposite the dog. Do not take hold of the harness or lead, as the blind person needs these to control the dog. Some guide dog owners prefer to walk at your side without holding your arm. In some situations you can also walk in front - the dog will follow you.

- **Do** give the blind person time to hold your arm securely and walk off.
- **Do** remember to give your partner adequate room round obstacles.
- **Do** watch out for hazards at head height, especially if your partner is taller than you. It's very easy to walk a blind person into an overhanging bush or a shop canopy.
- **Do** explain loud noises which may alarm them, such as cars back-firing.

17 *How to guide a blind person*. RNIB

© Adults' Learning Association 1999

- **Do** explain changes in ground surface, for example if you are walking from a pavement onto grass or gravel, or if paving slabs or road surfaces are particularly uneven.
- **Do** keep your guiding arm still and relaxed. Don't start waving it about or pointing at things.
- **Do** try to go at the blind person's pace.
- **Do** remember that very elderly people or those with other disabilities will need extra consideration.

From now on, we will refer to the guiding arm (yours) and the grip hand (the blind person's) which link you and your partner.

Walking in single file

You will often need to do this in shops, offices or other busy areas. Your partner will walk behind you instead of at your side.

First, tell your partner that you are approaching a narrow or busy area and that you will need to walk in single file. Move your guiding arm to the middle of your back, keeping it straight. Your partner should step in behind you, still holding on to your arm. To avoid her walking into you, the blind person should keep her arm straight. Don't turn round to check what's happening - your partner will follow you.

If the blind person has a guide dog she should drop its harness and let the dog walk behind her on the lead.

When there is room to walk side by side again, bring your arm back to its normal position. Your partner then returns to your side.

Changing directions

If you need to change the direction you are moving in, you should do an inward turn. With arms still linked, turn to face each other. The blind person should drop the arm she is holding and take your other arm with her other hand. Turn outwards and you're ready to move off in the opposite direction. This is a useful manoeuvre in many situations.

Kerbs and roads

Negotiating a kerb is simple but people are often uncertain what to do. When you are approaching a kerb, tell your partner so - and say whether it's 'kerb up' or 'kerb down'. Pause at the kerb slightly, before stepping up or down, and your partner will feel the change in arm movement.

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Many roads have rounded kerbs rather than kerbs at right angles. Make sure you approach these square on in the centre otherwise your partner may reach the kerb before you do.

- **Always** cross roads using the shortest distance (go straight across rather than crossing at an angle).
- **Do** use a pedestrian crossing if there is one but, if not, allow plenty of time for your partner to cross at a normal pace.
- **Don't** take risks.
- **If** you are parting company after crossing a road, do tell your partner where she is and which way she is facing.

Steps, stairs and slopes

When you approach steps or a slope, tell your partner so - and say whether the steps/slope go up or down. Wherever possible, the blind person should be on the side with the handrail. If you need to change sides, ask the blind person to stand still and let go of your guiding arm to allow you to change sides. Walk towards the handrail and show its position with your guiding arm.

If the steps are going up, step up, placing your weight on the first step. Your partner will feel your arm move and this is her cue to start. As you climb the second step, she is on the first. When you reach the top, take a slightly longer stride forward and stop, allowing your partner to negotiate the last step. As your partner feels her arm resume its normal position she will know that you are both on the level again.

Going down stairs is always more hazardous - so give your partner plenty of time to hold onto the handrail securely and gauge the edge of the first step. Otherwise, the technique is the same for going up stairs. Walk one step ahead of your partner and stop when you reach the bottom so she can feel, from your arm movement, that she is on the level again.

If you are not as tall as your partner, arm movements are not so clearly felt. But if you take your first step with the foot on the same side as the guiding arm, the movement is more obvious.

If your partner has a guide dog, the dog may be a substitute for the handrail or your partner may prefer to use both handrail and dog, rejoining you after the steps have been negotiated.

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Doorways

Getting through a doorway can be a little complicated. It's important to give your partner time to work out whether a door is opening towards or away from her, so take it slowly and take care.

Always go through a doorway with the blind person on the hinge side - change sides if necessary. Open the door with your guiding arm - this way your partner can easily tell whether the door is moving inwards or outwards. As you walk through the doorway your partner should place her hand flat against the door and slide it along to find the handle. She then follows you, slips her hand to the handle on the other side of the door and closes it. If you are going through a swing door, warn your partner so she does not try to close it. If you are in doubt about how to negotiate a doorway it may be easier to let your partner go through it by herself. Simply let go of her, open the door for her and rejoin her once she is through it. If your partner has a guide dog she will probably prefer this approach.

Revolving doors are best avoided, especially if your partner has a dog; there is nearly always an alternative. If you have to use one, position yourself so that the blind person is in the widest part and guide her in/out carefully.

Automatic doors pose no problems at all, though you should warn your partner if you are approaching them as the noise could be alarming if it's not expected.

Seating

Never back a blind person into a seat.

Guide your partner to a seat and describe it to her (for example - dining chair, low sofa, armchair). Ask her to let go of your guiding arm and place her grip hand on the back, arm or seat of the chair, whichever seems best. Then leave the rest to her. If the chair is pushed under a table, put your partner's hand on the chair back and tell her there is a table: again, she will do the rest.

Rows of seats

Most blind people prefer to be led into row of seats - change sides if necessary. When you reach your row, you and your partner side-step (step-pause-step) until she is central to her seat. She can manage the rest. If she has a guide dog, the dog should follow her.

When you are leaving, step to the other side of your partner so you can lead out in the same way. When you both reach the aisle you may need to change directions, in which case do an inward turn (as described under *Changing directions*).

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Cars and taxis

If you are travelling by car (or mini-cab), tell your partner whether she's getting into the front or back seat so she can allow for the space available. If using a 'London' taxi, say so, because the height of the step and the space inside is completely different from a car.

Place your guiding hand on the car door handle and tell your partner whether the car is facing left or right. She then slides her grip hand down your arm to find the door handle and, with her other hand, she should find the car roof. She can then open the car door and get in. If you wish to open the car door first, tell her you have done so and place your guiding hand on the roof so she can position herself from there. Then leave the rest to your partner. She should feel for the seat and get into it by herself.

At the end of your journey, open the car door for your partner and help her out.

Buses, coaches and trains

There are no hard and fast rules for getting on and off buses, coaches and trains as they vary so much in design. The basics are quite simple however:

- Point out any wider-than-average gaps between a train and the platform.
- Using your guiding arm to show the position of handrails/the backs of seats.
- Always go first - lead your partner on and off.
- Walk in single file along corridors and aisles.
- Give instructions when necessary, but don't overdo it.
- Avoid manhandling your partner.

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A quick quiz to check how much you can remember.

1 Should you take the blind person's arm of vice versa?

2 Can you remember at least four general points you need to keep in mind at all times?

3 What should you do when you need to walk in single file?

4 What should you do when you need to change direction?

5 If you were helping someone up the steps to the college, what would you need to do?

6 Are there any particular hazards getting into your building? How would you navigate them?

7 How does a difference in height make a difference?

8 Think about bringing someone into the room you work in. How would you navigate the doorway?

9 How should you guide someone into a row of seats?

Check your answers with the text in this resource.

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Resource 5 - Checklist for assessing access

Are there any arrangements for student transport? ☐

Are there any arrangements for meeting visually impaired students when they arrive for the first time? ☐

Is the entrance to the building well signposted? ☐

Is access to the building straightforward? ☐

Are the doors[18] and entrances[19] clear and hazard free? ☐

Are there steps to be negotiated? If so are they:
large? ☐ well lit? ☐ marked? ☐

Is reception easy to find? ☐

Within the building . . .

Is there a **tactile/raised map** available? ☐

Marking the way:

Are all decision points clearly highlighted? ☐

Are any of the **signs** in: Braille? ☐ large print? ☐

Do signs have clear colour contrast with walls? ☐

Are **doors** clearly marked/colour contrasted? ☐

Are **staircases**: clearly marked? ☐ hazard free[20]? ☐
provided with handrails? ☐

Are **lifts**: clearly marked externally? ☐
provided with Braille/large print markings on buttons? ☐

Is it clear how to get to:

classes? **toilets**? ☐ **library**? ☐
coffee bar? (and is the menu legible?) ☐

Lighting:

Is the building well lit and glare free? ☐

Are there ways in which lighting, colour and texture[21] could be used to enable easier access? ☐

Are volunteer **supporters** available? ☐

Are the **fire precautions** available in accessible form? ☐

Are there facilities (such as outdoor exercise areas) for **guide dogs**? ☐

[18] Name plates and/or numbers in raised/etched print, for example?
[19] If the entrance is large, the actual doorway could be indicated by a mat
[20] e.g. Start of staircase labelled, edges of stairs marked, sharp corners protected, low ceilings indicated
[21] e.g. changes in wall and/or floor coverings to indicate different areas and/or use of tactile strips

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Resource 6 - Easing into relationships

Do

- Introduce yourself by name
- Address the student by her/his name, when starting a conversation (so s/he knows who is being spoken to)
- Introduce the student to others who are present
- Remember that visually impaired people miss many of the visual clues and gestures that encourage sighted people to join in a conversation
- Speak normally
- Remember that all visually impaired people are different. Some will need more help than others. Some value their independence. Before helping, if in doubt, ask!
- Give precise directions, when asked. It's no use saying 'It's over there' and pointing.
- Tell the student when you are leaving - it's embarrassing to be left talking to air.

Don't

- Speak loudly
- Address the student as if s/he were a child or speak through a third person
- Leave the student standing alone in space. This can be disorienting. Guide her/him to a wall or a piece of furniture
- Grab someone and take charge - forcing your help on them
- Be put off if a blind person refuses your offer of help, perhaps rather rudely. (Blind people aren't saints, just individuals!) The next person may be more than glad of it.
- Fuss over a guide dog without first asking the owner. (A guide dog in harness is a working animal and should never be distracted.)
- Be afraid to use sighted terms such as 'Nice to see you' or 'Did you watch TV last night?'
- Be afraid of physical contact with your students - touch is not the same for the blind person as it is for someone who is sighted. Touching of hands, arms and shoulders is acceptable to many, although not all. However, don't . . .
- . . . grasp someone suddenly without warning - it can be scary, because there is no anticipation or preparation for those with little sight.

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Resource 7 - Checklist for pre-course interview

Topics to cover:

- Eye condition ☐
- Extent/type of residual vision ☐
- How residual vision might impact on course tasks ☐
- Mobility and need for guidance both inside and outside the classroom (including care of guide dog, if used) ☐
- Classroom/work space needs including:
  - lighting ☐
  - access to seating, desks, worktops ☐
  - access to/familiarity with equipment (for example, cassette players, IT equipment) ☐
  - access to the tutor ☐
- Comprehensive discussion of learning outcomes/syllabus ☐
- Prior experience (of subject and of integrated provision) ☐
- Preferred learning medium (and implications for organisation/study strategies) ☐
- Concerns that the student may have about the course
- Potential need for social/learning support/additional tutorials, bearing in mind: ☐
  - support available from family/friends/carers (for example, in reading/recording materials) ☐
  - the student's confidence/resilience/prior experience ☐
- Action plan ☐

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Resource 8 - Learning aids for the visually impaired

There are three main groups of learning aids which students - or the establishment in which you teach - might own. Alternatively you might suggest that your Branch make plans for investing in, or borrowing, appropriate equipment/resources. *Note: There's no substitute for experiencing the real thing - do try to visit a resource centre.*

Aids which enhance the capacity to read print

Enhance print by:	**Examples**
Increasing the size of the print	**Mechanical magnifiers** of varying kinds (including, for example, hand-held or on stands, for use close to the page or close to the eye, telescopes and binoculars). **Electronic aids**, such as: • **closed circuit television** (where the text is placed under a CCTV camera) • **television readers** (where the text to be read is scanned with a hand held scanner). • In both cases the text appears, highly magnified, on a monitor screen. Standard monitor screens can be adapted by attaching plastic sheets (called Fresnel lenses) which offer a small amount of magnification. Alternatively large monitors, of between 20 to 39 inches, can give one and a half to two times magnification • The RNIB's **electronic newspaper** (providing on floppy disk, which allows students with a computer to magnify the print to an appropriate size for them)
Increasing what can be seen in the remaining field of vision	Minifiers (various types as with magnifiers) to make text appear smaller
Bringing print closer to the eye	Special **reading stands** are available
Improving the lighting conditions	• **task lighting**, (angled desk lamps for example) • specially designed **torches** • **shields/filters** to diminish problems of glare

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Tactile methods of reading

Aid	Resources
Braille and Moon (another form of raised print, using shapes rather than dots)	**RNIB** (contact Customer Services) publish courses, books and newspapers in braille and Moon as well as a translation service. Computer text can be printed out in braille (from specially adapted PCs) using a braille embosser.
Raised diagrams and maps	**RNIB** offers (as do some local societies): • a raised-diagram copying service for maps, diagrams, graphs and drawings • the equipment to produce your own maps, diagrams graphs and drawings • tactile labels or 'Bump-Ons' - small raised self adhesive dots - which can be used to label controls on cassette recorders for example. You might use these as navigation aids in the classroom.

Equipment which substitutes hearing for vision

There are four main pieces of equipment which fall into this category:

Equipment	Resources
Tape recorders	Students with a tape-recorder will be able to: • borrow cassettes from the local library, the RNIB Cassette Library and Calibre (a lending library of books recorded on standard cassettes) • subscribe to talking newspapers (the RNIB's and any local one). It may be useful for you to check out the costs of having materials prepared on tape - and to make provision for students to record their work on tape rather than in written essay form. The local society for the blind may have the facility to quickly make a number of copies of tapes using the equipment that produces their own talking newspaper.

Radio, TV (including talking Teletext) and **video**	(Standard sources)
Talking book machines	The RNIB Talking Book Service can provide talking book players, a range of special headphones and a catalogue of talking books
Computers	Rapid advances are being made here, with voice synthesiser and braille 'translation' devices allowing speech or braille to be used as input and/or output from the system. You'll need specialist advice before investing in this form of equipment. The RNIB produces a series of factsheets about different forms of electronic equipment.

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Resource 9 - Resources for particular courses

Literature-based courses

Finding texts on **tape** - and mentioning their availability in course publicity - would immediately invite attendance from a whole new group of students. Check:

- your local **society for blind people** (or equivalent organisation). They may have:
  - a local library of books on cassette, which they are prepared to loan
  - facilities to tape your course material in multiple copies.
- the **public library service** (though these are usually limited collections)
- the **RNIB's Talking Book Service** and **cassette library**
- **Calibre's** cassette library loan service (addresses of RNIB and Calibre in **Resource 2**)

Many books are now available on commercial cassettes. Prices range from £8-£10 for a single book and from £15 for boxed sets. Catalogues are available from:

BBC (Radio Collection)	0181 743 5588
Harper Collins (Information Section)	0141 306 3100
Penguin (Audio Books Section)	0171 416 3000
Transworld (Customer Service, Corgi)§	0181 579 2652

The Talking Book Shop is a mail-order service specialising in audio books. Catalogue available from:

The Talking Book Shop, 11 Wigmore Street, London W1H 9LB. Tel: 0171 491 4117.

You should also consider the possibility of providing **large print** and/or **tactile materials** including braille, Moon, and raised diagrams/maps as appropriate. **RNIB Customer Services** would be your first point of contact here (0345 023153).

Art

The **Living Paintings Trust** makes an album of materials which communicate paintings, architecture and design to blind people. Each album contains an audio tape commentary; a series of thermoforms (raised diagrammatic representations) of the work which the individual feels while listening to the commentary, and a colour reproduction for any sighted companion or helper.

Living Paintings Trust, Queen Isobel House, Unit 8, Kingsclere Park, Newbury, Berks, RG20 4SW. Tel: 01635 299 771.

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In the WEA survey[22], an art tutor described how she changed her traditional approach to art teaching with her first group of visually impaired people - concentrating on the tactile experience of making pictures. However, when she had some experience she realised that she could successfully adapt her usual approach - drawing on the development of twentieth century painting and the emphasis on colour, shape and pattern rather than on trying to mirror reality. She encourages students to experiment with a variety of materials and this release from the obsession to produce photographic style images appears to have worked well for most of the students.

Drama

Drama is a valuable activity for blind and partially sighted people to engage in, not only for its own sake, but as a confidence building activity. **The National Association of Drama with the Visually Handicapped**:

- organises annual summer schools and weekend workshops
- can offer advice on setting up a drama workshop
- can even provide a tutor.

Details from Norman Machin, 153 Homefield Road, Sileby, Leics. Tel: 01509 812754.

The WEA survey[22] also includes an account of good practice by a drama teacher.

Music

The RNIB offers help in the enjoyment of music. Two main contacts here:

- **RNIB Music Advisory Service** 0171 388 1266
  (for general advice)
- **RNIB Customer Services** 0345 023153
  For information about the braille music transcription service and music in braille

For a more comprehensive list of specialist organisations, you should refer to the *In Touch Handbook 1995-96* (address in **Resource 1**).

You might also find it useful to read the WEA survey report (referred to earlier and mentioned in the footnote) in which tutors of different courses describe the ways in which they have adapted their course for visually impaired students.

[22] Payne R, Heinrich C P and Munby Z. Visually impaired Students and the Workers' Educational Association. RNIB, 1997

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Resource 10 - Tips for organising classroom space

Mobility and communication

- Make sure that passageways are obstacle free.
- Keep the layout consistent so they don't have to re-learn their way around.
- Try to use colour in a way that helps people to find things (for example, marking the edges of doors and light switches with coloured strips).
- Use 'Bump-Ons' (tactile strips available from RNIB) as another navigational aid for those with severe visual impairment.
- Group chairs fairly close together - preferably in a single tier circle - and:
  - Ask people to sit in the same place each week (This might be a more formal situation than you are used to, but provides continuity for the visually impaired, enabling them get to know people through their voices)
  - If you have any *hearing* impaired students in the group, invite them to sit close to you or otherwise in the best position for their hearing in a group setting.
- Aim to make the environment as quiet as possible to help people to use their hearing to focus on what is happening around them and to reduce distractions. A noisy environment is also a tiring one.
- Make sure the student's working area is large enough to accommodate any equipment such as cassette players (and that they are near power points).

Lighting

Make sure that:

- the room is uniformly lit and glare is eliminated (e.g. avoid glossy surfaces, if possible)
- shadows are minimised (all it takes, often, is a new light bulb)
- boards/other aids are well lit
- students who need task lighting are seated near to an electrical socket (make sure the lead to their light - or other equipment - isn't likely to be a safety hazard)
- any curtains in the room are pulled back
- students who have a measure of useful sight are sitting near a window
- students who are sensitive to light are facing away from the window.

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Resource 11 - Tips for managing the communication/learning process

Provide security/continuity and a positive supportive atmosphere:

- Put the visually impaired student in the same place between the same, supportive-but-not-condescending people each week
- Start with a roll call to increase familiarity with voices/seating positions
- Break your main lesson plan down into shorter steps than usual and summarise frequently
- Follow a similar pattern each week:
  - Review the previous session
  - Say what you're going to teach
  - Teach it
  - Say what you've taught
  - Preview what you are going to cover next week
- Make an effort to run the session interactively - but conduct the discussion skilfully (bringing people in and closing them down, tactfully, as appropriate)
- Always address people by name as you invite them to contribute (See **Resource 6**, too, for additional general communication tips)
- Watch for non-verbal signals of lack of attention - and change your tempo or style accordingly
- Be careful about your phrasing. Describe things clearly where before you might have used a picture - but don't get hung up about 'sighted' words (e.g. 'See you next week')
- Vary the media (see **Resource 9**) - provide a variety of activities within each session and try to use ones which use different senses
- Provide opportunities for talk between individuals and in small groups - use the opportunities for creating social support networks
- Encourage students to discuss their learning (more on progress review in **Resource 12**)
- Be aware that some students may also be deaf or hard of hearing (the **Bibliography** lists two helpful publications).

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Resource 12 - Checklist for reviewing progress

- Has the student achieved the proposed learning outcomes for this stage of the course?
- Which elements has s/he not achieved?
- In what ways might any shortfall be directly attributable to the effect of the type/extent of visual impairment? For example:
  - Have there been any attendance problems because of transport problems?
  - What other media/formats might have been useful?
  - What learning aids might be useful?
  - What problems have there been with group communication in terms of:
    - hearing/understanding what others are saying?
    - feeling able/encouraged to participate?
  - What problems has s/he had in recording the content of the class and the outcomes of any discussions?
  - How supportive have other members of the group been?
  - How successful have internal access arrangements been?
- What support has been requested/made available to the student in terms of handouts?

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Resource 13 - Visual Impairment Questionnaire

To help us to establish how many of our students have any difficulty at all with their vision, from long or short-sightedness through to more severe conditions, we would be grateful if you could answer these questions.

1 Please indicate (by circling) which age band you come into:

18-24 / 25-34 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / 65-74 / 75+

2 Do you wear glasses?

3 If you don't wear glasses, do you ever feel that you need them?

4 Do you have a specific eye condition?

5 If so, what is it?

6 How does this condition affect the way you see?

7 Do any of the activities in this class present difficulties for you because you cannot see well enough (for example, seeing a board or flipchart, reading hand-outs, reading books, sources or documents)?

8 Do you have any difficulty in reading:

Publicity brochures

Leaflets about courses

Enrolment forms

Course outlines

Learning outcomes record forms

How can these be improved?

9 Are there any ways in which you would like help from the WEA or tutor (for example, magnifying aids, larger print, tapes)?

10 Are there any suggestions you would like to make?

Thanks for taking the time to fill this in.

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Resource 14 - A model for a training event

Course details handout

Working with visually impaired students

This event is intended, primarily, for tutors of courses attended by visually impaired students (either separately or as part of integrated provision).
The aims are threefold:

- to raise awareness about specific forms of visual impairment
- to give you an opportunity to explore available learning aids and resources
- to enable you to share good practice in teaching.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session you should be able to:

- Define 'blind', 'partially sighted' and 'visually impaired'
- Describe different kinds of visual loss, some common eye conditions and the effect each has on vision
- Describe ways of adapting the learning environment (the classroom layout and your teaching methods and materials) to meet the students needs

Course Programme

1 Welcome and introduction

2 What do we mean by visual impairment? A definition of terms

3 Common misconceptions about people with visual disability and some statistics

4 Different kinds of visual loss and associated eye conditions

5 Sight loss simulation exercise, including guiding skills

Coffee break

6 Video - ***Seeing it our way***

7 Guidelines for tutors - presentation and group discussion

Lunch break

8 What learning aids and resources can my students and I use?

9 Teaching visually impaired students - group discussion

10 Evaluation

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Session plan for trainers

Content	Time	Methods	Materials
Introduction	10 min	Introduce course Group introduce themselves Discuss Learning Outcomes	OHT or handout of session plan
• What do we mean by visual impairment? • Countering common assumptions about visual impairment • Common eye conditions	30 min	Presentation using OHT and slides	• OHT/handout based on pages 8-9 • OHT and handouts (see following pages) • Slides - ***Eye to Eye*** (see **Resource 1**)
• Sight loss simulation • Guiding a blind person	45 min	• Activities using simulation spectacles (making a drink, filling in a form, reading texts, writing a letter etc) • Demonstration and practice in guiding a blind person	• Simulation spectacles and materials to support activities, such as equipment for making drinks and specially prepared forms • Handout on guiding (**Resource 4**)
Coffee	15 min		
Video ***Seeing it our way***	40 min	Viewing followed by discussion	Video (see **Resource 1**)
Guidelines for tutors	20 min	• Presentation • Question and answer • Discussion	Handouts (see **Resources 3** and **6**)
Lunch	45 min		
What learning aids and resources can I and my students use?	30 min	Presentation and demonstration	• Resources such as hand magnifiers, raised maps/ diagrams, audio books, talking newspaper • Provide **Resources 8** and **9**
Teaching visually impaired students	45 min	Small group discussion with report back	• Handout of questions to be discussed (see Session 6 of trainer's notes) • Provide **Resources 2, 10-12**
Evaluation	15 min		

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Blindness - some statistics

The following information is based on statistics from *Blind and partially sighted adults in Great Britain: the RNIB survey* (1991) presented in an RNIB factsheet.

Numbers in population

380,000 are registrable as blind

579,000 are registrable as partially sighted

380,000 + 579,000 = 959,000 visually impaired

But only 188,000 are registered as either!

Levels of perception

Of **registered blind** people

- 4% have no light perception
- 19% can recognise a face across the street
- 27% can read newsprint

Of **all visually impaired** adults

- 29% use ordinary print

Additional disability

Of all visually impaired adults

- 35% have a hearing loss
- 12% are registered for additional disability
- 45% report additional limiting condition

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Employment

Of registered visually impaired adults of working age

- 25% are in employment
- 68% have worked in the past
- 8% have never been employed

Note: 31% of all disabled people are in work

Reading methods

- 1% of blind and partially sighted people use braille
- 48% use standard print
- 21% use personal readers
- 13% use tapes or talking books

Guide dogs

1% of all visually impaired adults use a guide dog

Onset of sight problem by age

Percentage of persons with visual impairment from birth, through accident or other causes

	16-59	60-74	75+	Total
From birth	30%	12%	3%	8%
Accident	8%	7%	3%	5%
Other	60%	80%	91%	85%

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Notes for trainers

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Start by introducing yourself and ask any co-trainers to do likewise.
- Ask group members to introduce themselves, saying something about their experience of this area of work.
- Go through the session plan and the learning outcomes and answer any questions.

Session 1: What do we mean by visual impairment? (30 minutes)

This session sets the context for the training event and contains a lot of information that you may choose to reinforce with OHTs or handouts. You will need to take questions as they arise. The presentation (either by WEA Tutor Organiser or co-trainer) should:

- define commonly used terms such as blind, partially sighted, visually impaired, failing sight
- counter common assumptions about visual impairment
- describe the main kinds and causes of sight loss - and use the RNIB *Eye to Eye* slides with accompanying notes mentioned in **Resource 1** to demonstrate what a person experiencing the following conditions would see and discuss what coping strategies might be used in each case:
  - cataracts
  - nystagmus
  - glaucoma
  - retinitis pigmentosa
  - macular disease
  - diabetic retinopathy.

Session 2: Simulation exercises (45 minutes)

This session is intended to raise awareness by allowing participants to experience, albeit in a crude sense, some of the types of vision loss explained in the first session.

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You will need a set of specially designed spectacles, called simulation spectacles, mentioned in **Resource 1**. There are two options here. Either provide a set of the RNIB ones which simulate blurred and patchy vision or borrow the loan set of goggles from National Office which simulate a range of ten different eye conditions. Both versions come with accompanying notes for trainers.

Participants (in turn and with a sighted partner, to prevent accidents!) should attempt everyday tasks, such as preparing a drink, making a telephone call, reading different types of text, filling in a form, or writing a letter whilst one of them is wearing a pair of simulation spectacles. You will need to have set up a number of tasks before the session. Make sure participants can move from one task to another and that both partners get a turn. Explain the tasks and the sequence clearly to the whole group before they begin.

Next, demonstrate - with a co-tutor - some basic guiding skills. Participants should then spend some time practising in pairs (still using the spectacles), to enable them to learn how to be a guide and what it feels like to entrust yourself to being guided.

You may wish to pause for a brief discussion about what they have just experienced or take a coffee break to allow for informal discussion.

Session 3: Video, *Seeing it our way* (40 minutes)

Show the video (17 minutes long - details in **Resource 1**) in which blind and partially sighted adults talk directly about what sighted people can do to support them. Follow with a group discussion to consider the issues raised.

Session 4: Guidelines for tutors (20 minutes)

Summarise good practice for WEA tutors. (You could use Section 3 of this pack for guidance and, in addition, **Resource 3,** *Clear print guidelines* and **Resource 6**, *Easing into relationships*). Allow for questions as you proceed and a more general discussion, at the end of the session, for participants to raise their own questions and concerns. Those that cannot be answered immediately should be taken up in the afternoon sessions.

Session 5: What learning aids and resources can I/my students use? (30 minutes)

Demonstrate learning aids and other resources available to classes and discuss their use. Ideally, you will have the resources/aids themselves. Otherwise bring along RNIB materials with illustrations. This is also an opportunity to go through the list of contacts for specialist resources according to the subjects participants are likely to be teaching in future. (**Resources 8 and 9**)

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Session 6: Teaching visually impaired students (45 minutes)

The aim of this session is for:

- participants who have already some experience of teaching visually impaired students to focus on their experience, good and bad, to see what emerges as best practice
- all participants to use what they have discovered so far during the event to consider a number of questions, such as the following, and to pose their own:
  - What information do you need about students prior to meeting them?
  - What preparations are necessary before your class meets for the first time?
  - How do you handle the first meeting?
  - What problems have you experienced and how have you dealt with them?
  - What course materials/artefacts/audio material or other stimuli have been particularly successful with your students?
  - How do you handle discussion in class?
  - How do you get feedback from students on their learning?

Divide participants into small groups of 3 - 4. Give each group a sheet of flipchart paper and ask them to summarise their discussion. Remind each group to identify a reporter to feedback to the whole group.

After 20 - 30 minutes ask each group reporter to speak to the points noted on their flipchart. This should promote wider discussion and sharing of ideas and strategies for managing groups, producing or obtaining resources and overcoming difficulties.

Session 7: Evaluation (15 minutes)

Evaluation is particularly important if this type of training has not been offered previously. You might want to obtain verbal feedback from participants or use your District's own evaluation form.

End the event by thanking everyone for coming and asking for their completed expenses forms. You may also wish to discuss with participants what further support they need as tutors and what future training is available.

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